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Item 4 of the provisional agenda

ACTIVITY REPORT OF THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL HABITATS FOR THE PERIOD 2016-2017

1. The Executive Secretary is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the twenty-first meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, the activity report of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats for the period 2016-2017.
2. The present report is relevant to the work of the Convention on Biological Diversity, in particular with regard to the implementation of Aichi Biodiversity Targets 9, 11, and 12.
3. The document is being circulated in the form and language in which it was received by the Secretariat.

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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

37th meeting
Strasbourg, 5-8 December 2017

ACTIVITY REPORT 2016-2017

*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation*

**Bern Convention on the Conservation of
European Wildlife and Natural Habitats**

Activity Report 2016-2017

1. About the Bern Convention

What we do

The Bern Convention is a treaty in the field of nature conservation, covering most of the natural heritage of the European continent, and extending to some states of Africa too. At the end of 2017, it has 51 Contracting Parties, including the European Union.

This regional treaty aims to conserve wild flora and fauna species and their habitats, especially those whose conservation requires co-operation between several countries. It was the first international treaty to protect both species and habitats and to bring countries together to decide upon how to act on nature conservation and promote sustainable development.

In the period 2016-2017, the Convention focused most of its work and adopted new standards on the following conservation issues: (1) natural habitats conservation through site selection, (2) spread of invasive alien species, (3) climate change and biodiversity, (4) illegal bird killing and (5) amphibian's and reptile's conservation. In addition, major efforts were deployed in ensuring a high level of monitoring of the Convention's implementation through the various tools provided for this work, case-file system, follow-up of previous recommendations and specific sites visits.

All achievements for the period 2016-2017 in the various fields mentioned above are developed in detail in the next sections of this Activity Report.

The institutional functioning

The Standing Committee is the governing body of the Bern Convention. It includes all Contracting Parties as well as observer states and organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, at the national and international level. It meets annually and adopts recommendations concerning measures that should be taken to achieve the Convention's objectives and improve its effectiveness. It also monitors the implementation of the Convention and provides guidance on this and further possible development.

The Bureau of the Standing Committee, composed of 5 members, takes administrative and organisational decisions in between meetings of the Standing Committee.

In the period 2016-2017, a 4 to 5 member Secretariat assisted the Convention institutions and Parties and coordinated the implementation of the Convention.

Members of the Bureau to the Standing Committee in 2016:	Members of the Bureau to the Standing Committee in 2017:
• Mr Øystein STØRKERSEN, <u>Chair of the Standing Committee to the Convention</u>, Principal Advisor, Norwegian Environment Agency, Norway • Mr Jan PLESNIK, Former Chair of the Standing Committee to the Convention, Adviser to Director, Nature Conservation Agency, Czech Republic • Ms Hasmik GHALACHYAN, Head of the Division of Plant Resources Management, Agency of Bioresources Management, Ministry of Nature Protection, Armenia	• Mr Øystein STØRKERSEN, <u>Chair of the Standing Committee to the Convention</u>, Principal Advisor, Norwegian Environment Agency, Norway • Mr Jan PLESNIK, Former Chair of the Standing Committee to the Convention, Adviser to Director, Nature Conservation Agency, Czech Republic • Ms Sandrine LIEGEOIS, Attachée, Département de la Nature et des Forêts, Wallonia, Belgium • Ms Jana DURKOŠOVÁ, Senior State Advisor, Division for Nature and Landscape Protection, Ministry of the Environment, Slovak Republic

Members of the Bureau to the Standing Committee in 2016:	Members of the Bureau to the Standing Committee in 2017:
• Mr Felix Zaharia, First Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania • Mr Michal ADAMEC, Director of Department for Nature and Landscape Protection, State Nature Conservancy, Slovak Republic	• Mr Ihor IVANENKO, Director, Department of Protected Area, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Ukraine

Financial contributions from Contracting Parties

Every year, Contracting Parties are invited by the Chair of the Standing Committee to the Convention to send additional financial resources to support the Programme of Work of the Convention. These financial resources are used to fill in the gap between the total annual cost of the Programme of Work of the Convention and the annual allocation to the Convention by the Council of Europe Ordinary Budget.

Several Parties send regular annual voluntary contributions, others make occasional contributions depending on their national budget availabilities:

Additional financial contributions to the Bern Convention's Special Account 2016	Additional financial contributions to the Bern Convention's Special Account 2017
Andorra Belgium (Wallonia Region) Czech Republic Croatia European Union Finland Norway (Norwegian Environment Agency) Norway (Ministry of Climate and Environment) Poland Serbia Slovak Republic Switzerland	Belgium Cyprus Croatia Czech Republic European Union Finland Luxembourg Monaco Norway (Norwegian Environment Agency) Poland Serbia Slovak Republic Switzerland
Countries hosting of meetings in 2016	Countries hosting of meetings in 2017
Albania Belarus Bosnia and Herzegovina Georgia Italy Republic of Moldova Norway Spain Ukraine	Georgia Malta Norway Portugal Serbia

The Bern Convention in numbers in 2016-2017:

- 13 new Recommendations adopted - bringing the total number of Bern Convention Recommendations to 197;
- 15 new complaints received - bringing the total number of complaints to the Convention to 174;
- Follow-up of the implementation by Parties of 10 previous Recommendations;
- 19 on-the-spot appraisals to EDPA sites and case-file related areas;
- 17 meetings of Groups of Experts, ad-hoc restricted Working Groups and 6 meetings of institutional bodies of the Convention;
- 4 Emerald Network sufficiency evaluation Seminars;
- 1 041 adopted Emerald Network sites in 5 Contracting Parties;
- 2 079 Candidate Emerald sites in 11 Contracting Parties and observer States;
- 73 areas holding the European Diploma for Protected Areas;
- 12 national and international NGOs added to the list of official Observers to the Convention, bringing the list to a total of 85 organisations.

2. Monitoring of the implementation of the legal aspects of the Bern Convention in 2016-2017

The Convention benefits from a number of tools for the regular monitoring of its implementation. This monitoring system includes biennial reports on the use of exceptions that are allowed under Article 9 by Parties and the case-file system, fully accessible to Parties and observers alike. The Standing Committee monitors the implementation of the Convention at each meeting by reviewing reports, processing case-files and adopting recommendations.

In line with the recently adopted clarification of the Parties' reporting obligations under Article 9 of the Convention [Revised Resolution No. 2 (1993)], biennial reports should comply with the conditions set under Article 9 of the Convention and thus:

- address all of the substantive issues included under Article 9;
- be submitted every two years;
- be supplied in one of the Council of Europe official languages;
- be sent in a format allowing the Secretariat to make them public.

Since the operational launch of the Bern Convention Online Reporting System (ORS) in 2015, developed in order to simplify the task of national authorities in meeting their reporting requirements under several biodiversity-related Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs), reporting is facilitated and supported by user-friendly and up-to-date tools. The ORS is developed by the UN Environment World Commission for Monitoring Conservation (WCMC).

Despite a relatively high number of important technical issues reported by Parties in the course of 2016 and 2017, the ORS system allowed for the collection of a large number of biennial reports by Parties for the period 2013-2014.

During the second half of 2017, an update to the ORS system was operated by the colleagues from WCMC. Additionally, the questionnaire for the 2015-2016 biennial reports was updated and assigned to Parties' registered users. This is expected to allow for an improved rate in Parties' reporting for the biennial exercises covering 2015-2016.

3. Monitoring of sites at risk and of EDPA sites

A series of on-the-spot visits were organised in the period 2016-2017. These took place in the frame of the two monitoring mechanisms of the Convention: its case-file system and the European Diploma for Protected Areas.

Monitoring of areas holding the European Diploma for Protected Areas

The monitoring mechanism of the European Diploma for Protected Areas is twofold: 1) Diploma holding areas are expected to report annually on the actions implemented in order to comply with conditions and recommendations set in the award Resolutions of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and 2) on-the-spot appraisal visits are decided by the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas.

In view of the renewal of the award to the areas concerned, 19 standard appraisal visits were organised in the period 2016 and 2017, while no exceptional on-the-spot appraisals were organised for monitoring purposes. All areas due for renewal in 2016 and 2017 have received a green light from the Group of Specialists managing the Diploma.

In 2017, the Group of Specialists decided not to renew the European Diploma to Bialowieza National Park in Poland. The case was pending before the Group for 10 years, since the suspension of the renewal in 2007 due to the lack of a management plan for the area. The Council of Europe experts having visited the area for a possible renewal of the Diploma in 2016 noted the importance of appropriate management of the surrounding Bialowieza Forest to ensure the exceptional natural values of the National Park. The latest information received by the Group was that the management of the Bialowieza Forest was not compatible and was having a negative impact on the NP.

Another long standing case of concern for the Group of Specialists was the Poloniny National Park in the Slovak Republic. The area saw its Diploma renewed in 2008 for a 10 year period, under the condition that a Management Plan was quickly adopted. Concerned with the significant delays in the adoption of the Management Plan, the Group of Specialists has -at several occasions- sent warnings to the Standing Committee to the Convention about the major delays in the finalisation of the document. In 2016, after several years of negotiations at national level, a management plan was adopted for the area and this was seen as a positive signal by the Group of Specialists. The renewal of the European Diploma to Poloniny National Park falls due in 2018 and will therefore be debated at the 2018 annual meeting of the Group of Specialists.

Finally, the Group of Specialists decided to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal visit to the Central Balkan National Park (Bulgaria) whose European Diploma was suspended in 2014 pending the adoption of a Management Plan. As the Management Plan was finally adopted in 2016, the Group of Specialists will discuss the conclusions of the appraisal report at its next annual meeting before considering the renewal of the European Diploma of the Central Balkan National Park in 2018.

Monitoring of sites at risk under the frame of the Bern Convention case-file system

In June 2016, the Bern Convention joined efforts with AEWA in organising a joint mission to Iceland to review the threats posed by the country's forestry policy to habitats and migratory birds. The mission covered both the AEWA Implementation Review Process (IRP) and the follow-up of the implementation of the Bern Convention Recommendation No. 96 (2002) on conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, especially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland.

As a result of the visit, Recommendation No. 190 (2016) on the conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, especially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland was adopted, superseding and replacing the previous Recommendation No. 96 (2002). The monitoring of the implementation by the newly adopted Recommendation was done in 2017 at the 37th Standing Committee.

In October 2016, the Convention carried out an on-the-spot appraisal to the Akamas peninsula in Cyprus, in the frame of the long-term open case-file before the convention concerning the conservation of marine turtles in the area.

The appraisal confirmed a series of conservation problems and identified a set of recommended actions, the implementation of which should lead to an improvement in the conservation status of the site. Recommendation No. 191 (2016) on the conservation of the Akamas peninsula and the sea turtle nesting beaches of Chrysochou Bay was adopted in November 2016 by the Standing Committee and its implementation was monitored in 2017 at the 37th meeting of the Committee.



4. Conservation of natural habitats

1. Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest

Steady progress in the Network coverage, site numbers and sufficiency rates

Over the past decade and especially in 2016/2017, the Convention dedicated a large amount of resources, both human and financial, towards the establishment of its network of areas of special conservation interest. The Emerald Network represents the counterpart of the EU Natura 2000 Network beyond the border of the EU countries (also Contracting Parties to the Convention) and facilitates the harmonisation of standards in nature conservation on the European continent.

Currently, 16 countries¹ are actively working on the establishment of the Emerald Network. Progress has developed momentum over the previous years, in particular in the period 2016-2017 as overall statistics on the Emerald Network coverage significantly improved since 2014-2015.

A particularly encouraging development was the highly anticipated update of the list of adopted Emerald sites. Until 2016, the Network had been relying exclusively on the contribution of Switzerland's 37 adopted Emerald sites. At the 36th Standing Committee in November 2016, Belarus and Ukraine requested the Standing Committee to officially adopt their lists of candidate Emerald sites. The strong commitment from these countries is marked, as the official adoption of a given country's Emerald sites initiates Phase III of the Network constitution process which calls for action towards the national designation of the sites and the planning and implementation of management, monitoring and reporting measures aligned to the sites.

At the end of 2017, the Emerald Network counts:

- 3,110 candidate or adopted Emerald sites;
- covering more than 700,000 km² in 16 countries and,
- representing an average of 12% of these 16 countries' national coverage.

2017 resulted in the adoption by the Standing Committee of the candidate sites from Georgia, Norway and the Russian Federation. It is worth to be stressed that the decision of the Russian Federation, as an observer State to the Convention, is unprecedented and hopefully paves the path to further commitment towards the Bern Convention.

¹ Albania, Armenia, Azerbaïdjan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Montenegro, Morocco, Norway, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation (Observer to the Convention), Serbia, Switzerland, « the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia » and Ukraine.

How well is the Emerald network performing?

In the reporting period 2016-2017, 5 Emerald Network evaluation Seminars took place, targeting the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Norway, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

These scientific evaluation events are aimed at measuring the extent to which the Emerald Network sites in a given country are fit for ensuring the long term conservation of species and habitats of European importance. They result in documents titled “Conclusions on the Network sufficiency for each country and for each protected species and habitats groups”. Most importantly, they constitute a scoreboard and homework for each Party concerned, clearly identifying the species and the habitats for which they should find additional areas to ensure sufficient protection in the long term.

While the sufficiency rates vary greatly between countries, species groups and habitats, it is important to underline that for some Parties, in particular those from the EU Eastern Partnership region and the Russian Federation, progress has proved to be extremely quick in the past biennium.

Armenia reaches the highest sufficiency rate in regard to bird species of all Emerald countries so far. The country’s existing Emerald Network of 23 sites, covering 36.5 % of the country’s territory, is sufficient for ensuring the survival of 59.3 % of the bird species protected through the Emerald Network. Georgia’s current Emerald Network (55 sites covering 15.8 % of the country’s territory) is sufficient to ensure the survival of 37.5% of non-avian animals protected through the Network, while Ukraine is the leader for the protection of habitat types with its 271 sites covering 10.4 % of the country territory, reaching a 36.6% sufficiency.

Last but not least, in 2017 the Convention started to work on a way for Parties to notify and explain any change, positive or negative, taking place in a given Emerald Network site on their territories. At the next stage, in the biennium 2018-2019, the Convention is planning to focus its efforts on describing what the ecological character of a given Emerald Network site is, how changes in the ecological character should be detected and how to adequately respond to them.

Reporting on the conservation status of Emerald species and habitats

Resolution No. 8 (2012) on the national designation of adopted Emerald Network sites and the implementation of management, monitoring and reporting measures, provides for the implementation of regular (every 6 years) reporting by Parties working on the network implementation. The Group of Experts on Ecological Networks and Protected Areas was charged with working on the reporting requirements and preparing a reporting format for the exercise.

A Restricted Group of Experts was established in 2016, mandated to deal with the issue. At its second meeting held in 2017, the Group reached an agreement on the issue. The reporting under Resolution No. 8 (2012) will deal with the conservation status of habitats and species protected through the Emerald Network (listed respectively in Resolutions No. 4 (1996) and No. 6 (1998)). It will be organised in a similar way as the EU Article 17 (Habitats Directive) and Article 12 (Birds Directive) reporting and will use an adapted version of the reporting formats and tools prepared for the EU Nature Directives reporting for the period (2013-2018).

This will allow for the reporting exercise to be meaningful and to serve the objectives of the Convention, to facilitate a pan- European analysis of the conservation status of species and habitats of European importance. Due to the difficulties that arise for Parties and the complexity of the whole endeavour, a decision was made to limit the first reporting exercise to a selection of species and habitats. This sub-set of features to be reported on will comprise all species groups from Resolution No. 6 (1998).

Streamlining access to Emerald Network information and facilitating its use

During the biennium, efforts were put into the development of new tools for improving public and practitioners’ access to information on the Emerald Network. This essential work was developed with

the support of the long-term partners to the Convention, the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity (ETC/BD). It resulted in the launch of the Emerald Network online Viewer, allowing for the consultation of Emerald Network proposed, candidate and adopted sites in the 16 countries working on its establishment, as well as for the consultation of the sites databases (Standard Data Forms). In the biennium to come, pending available financial resources, efforts are to focus on the development of new functionalities for the Viewer, namely, the search of areas in the network for given species or habitats protected through the Network.

In addition, negotiations were opened on the inclusion of the Emerald Network sites into the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) and its online interface Protected Planet, managed by the WCMC.

2. Sites of exceptional value for nature conservation in Europe

European Diploma for Protected Areas: recognising the exceptional European biological, geological or landscape diversity

In fifty years of existence, the European Diploma for Protected Areas was awarded to only a handful of areas in Europe. This prestigious international award, handed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and placed under the management of the Bern Convention and its institutional bodies, is unique in its kind. It is awarded to only certain areas in recognition of their exceptional European interest, from the standpoint of conserving biological, geological or landscape diversity. The Diploma is also awarded for the quality of their protection and conservation and this implies that there are measures put in place by those responsible for its management to ensure the continuation of this protection in the long term and established methods to monitor the state of conservation.

At the end of 2017, 73 areas in 28 countries hold the Diploma.

Monitoring the exemplary management of the Diploma holding areas

In the period 2016-2017, the monitoring of the implementation of the European Diploma Network was significantly improved thanks to the revision of the Diploma regulations with a new, simplified model plan for annual reports that has been subsequently adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. The new simplified model plan for annual reports was used for the first time in 2015 and helped improve the reporting rate by Diploma holding areas, reaching 87% and remaining stable in 2016.

During the biennium, an exceptionally high number of on-the-spot appraisals in view of the renewal of the European Diploma took place. The 19 visits held in 2016 and 2017 resulted in the same number of draft Resolutions which will be submitted for official adoption by the Committee of Ministers to the Council of Europe in spring 2018. Importantly, the list of independent experts leading European Diploma missions and appraisals has been updated in 2017, in particular in view of ensuring a greater gender equality balance.

Eventually, at its meeting in 2016, the Group of Specialists in charge of the monitoring of the European Diploma initiated a change in one of the provisions of the European Diploma Regulations. The motivation for this was that the Group felt that the present provisions could be interpreted as providing for an automatic renewal of the award to the areas after a first renewal, which seemed to contradict the standards of high quality required by the EDPA.

The Group therefore proposed to amend Article 9 para.7 of the Resolution of the Committee of Ministers CM/ResDip (2008) 1 on the revised Regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas. The draft new text of Article 9 para.7 was subsequently revised further by the Standing Committee, in order to include a clear mention of NGOs contribution to the monitoring of the management of Diploma holding areas and provide for a regular consultation with civil society organisations when a renewal is to be considered.

The draft new text of Article 9 para.7 is submitted for official adoption to the Committee of Ministers to the Council of Europe.



5. Conservation of Species

1. Fighting the spread of Invasive Alien Species

In 2016-2017, the work on Invasive Alien Species (IAS) continued to focus on assisting states in the implementation of the European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species and prevent or minimize adverse impacts of IAS on Europe's biodiversity, as foreseen under Aichi target 9.

Further to the work completed during the previous biennium on analysing IAS pathways to support the development of new voluntary Codes of Conduct and Guidelines, in 2016 the Convention developed **Guidance for Governments concerning invasive alien species pathways action plans**. The Guidance document was endorsed by the Standing Committee which considered that it offers useful assistance for action at national level and invited Parties and Observers to examine it attentively.

Three new Codes of Conduct were prepared under the Convention, with the support of experts and partner organisations, such as the IUCN ISSC:

1. **European Code of Conduct on Recreational Boating and Invasive Alien Species**
2. **Code of Conduct on International Travel and IAS**
3. **Code of Conduct on Invasive Alien Trees**

Specific action supporting the eradication of IAS species continued to be implemented in the reporting period. The Convention developed a **Recommendation [No. 189 (2016)] on the control of the American mink (*Neovison vison*) in Europe**, a species which could have a very negative impact on native European fauna.

The eradication of the ruddy duck continued to be a priority for the Convention and progress in the implementation of the European Strategy for the eradication of the ruddy duck in the Western Palearctic remained steady in all countries concerned. In order to support and guide efforts by Parties, the committee to the Convention adopted **Recommendation No. 185 (2016) on the eradication of the ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in the Western Palearctic by 2020**. To support Parties further, an expert meeting on the implementation of the Action Plan for the eradication of the Ruddy duck was organised in Sevilla (Spain) on 30-31 January 2017. The meeting helped to identify priority areas for action, taking into account the current state of affairs in each relevant country.

Highlights on IAS action in 2016-2017:

- 3 new Codes of Conduct
- 1 Guidance document concerning invasive alien species pathways action plans
- Recommendation on the control of the American Mink in Europe
- Recommendation on the eradication of the Ruddy Duck the Western Palearctic

Last but not least, the Convention is one of the supporters of the Honolulu Challenge endorsed at the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress.

2. Tackling illegal bird killing

The Network of the Special Focal Points (SFP) for illegal killing of birds set up during the previous biennium continued to be extremely active as a catalyst for improved synergies at the national and international level among all relevant bodies, by ensuring information flow and sharing of best practices. Its membership kept growing during the current reporting period. In 2017, the Network counts on the expertise of 32 experts appointed by 28 Parties to the Convention.

In 2016, the Convention developed a mid-term review of progress in the implementation of the Convention's Tunis Action Plan 2020 for the eradication of illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds. Although progress is visible in many areas, it still varies greatly between countries. Areas such as the identification of national policing/investigation priorities or the improvement of the awareness of the judiciary system about IKB seem to have benefitted from more particular attention by most Parties. However, many Parties still do not sufficiently invest in improving knowledge of IKB, the understanding of its drivers or in identifying black spots.

In order to accompany efforts by national authorities, the Convention developed several tools, such as Guidelines for the identification of black-spots and Recommendation (No. 177(2015) on the gravity factors and sentencing principles for the evaluation of offences against birds, in particular IKB. However, the mid-term review shows that most countries seem to not have taken advantage of such methodology.

The Standing Committee continuously encourages Parties to speed up their efforts in particular in areas where their action has been assessed as insufficient by the mid-term review.

In the past biennium, the Bern Convention Network of Special Focal Points on IKB met twice, respectively in Tirana (Albania) in 2016 and in Sliema (Malta) in 2017.

The 2017 meeting proved to be a major milestone in the work of the Convention, most importantly because it was a joint endeavour by the Bern Convention and the Convention on Migratory Species. The Bern Network of Special Focal Points on IKB and the CMS MIKT Task Force on IKB in the

Mediterranean region thus organised the first ever joint meeting in Sliema on 22-23 May 2017 and achieved the main expected result – endorsing the Scoreboard for measuring progress in combatting IKB in Europe.

The IKB Scoreboard is intended to provide national governments with a tool for an objective, fact-based national self-assessment of the current status of illegal killing of birds at national level. It is designed to enable States to measure their progress in implementing their commitments related to this area. The indicators framework has been developed with the view of offering national administrations a simple tool, which, given the complexity of the issue at stake, is easy to compile and interpret and which may be applied either at national, or appropriate sub-national scales.

Highlights on IKB related activities in 2016-2017:

- Growing membership of the Network of Special Focal Points for IKB
- Scoreboard for measuring progress in combatting illegal killing, taking and trade of wild birds
- [#Thelasttweet](#) Social Media Campaign raising awareness of IKB

3. Supporting bird conservation in Europe

In the past years, the Group of Experts on the Conservation of birds' main role was to advise the decision-making bodies to the Convention, in particular in relation to case-files and complaints linked to bird species' conservation.

In the period 2016-2017, the Group met once for its 6th meeting, which took place in Malta on 21 June 2017. The Group ensured the follow-up of three complaints related to wild birds in Serbia and Turkey and provided avenues for further work by the national authorities concerned to find appropriate solutions to the issues at stake.

In addition, the Group initiated an important discussion on its future work priorities. It was agreed that operating in a complex landscape of various actors involved in bird species conservation, the Bern Convention needs to find avenues for bringing new life into its action in the field. One of the strengths of the Convention agreed by the Group is its frontrunner stand in many issues linked to birds' conservation in the past, later taken on board by other actors. The issue of illegal killing of birds is a perfect example.

The Group of Experts could play a catalyst role for the development of ideas related to new emerging issues and as a coordination mechanism for Contracting Parties, feeding into the work of other groups under other instruments, such as Flyways Groups, Energy Working Group, Poisoning Group, Renewables Group, etc, under both the CMS and the AEWA.

In the period 2018-2019, the Group should work towards reviewing its mandate and developing a Framework Programme of Work (FPoW) with clear expected outcomes, based on the work priorities identified at the 6th meeting. One of the main issues to be considered for the future Work Programme of the Group is the control of the potential impact of derogations (Article 9 of the BC) on the conservation status of the species (possibly in cooperation with the EC).

4. Amphibians and Reptiles

After a 10 year long period of inactivity, the Group of Experts on Amphibians and Reptiles met in July 2015 in the frame of the previous biennium, and again in 2017. Since 2015 the main focus of work for the Group was the issue of diseases and new threats from known and unknown pathogens to amphibian species in particular.

By adopting Recommendation No. 176 (2015) on the prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus, -a fungal disease imported from Asia with disastrous impacts on amphibian species populations-, the Convention became the first international legal body to officially consider the threat posed by the pathogen, through adopted standards and recommendations.

In the period 2016-2017, focus was put on following-up efforts deployed by Parties to the Convention to implement the series of recommended measures that should contribute to halt or at least slow down the spread of the fungal

Highlights on herpetofauna conservation in 2016-2017:

- Follow-up of implementation of Recommendation No. 176 (2015) on the prevention and control of BSal
- Development of new Recommendation on biosafety measures, targeting both A&R species

disease in Europe. Although progress was considered as generally slow, many of the Parties most concerned by the threat have reacted and engaged in particular transnational cooperation, also with the important support of the European Union.

Importantly, thanks to the assessment of progress in implementing Recommendation No. 176 (2015), the Group could conclude that while focus was placed on the urgent need for action on BSal, threat from many other pathogens is raising and do not only concern amphibian species. In order to address this gap, the Group agreed it was necessary to draft and put forward a general Recommendation on biosafety measures for the prevention of diseases for both amphibian and reptile species. At its 37th meeting in December 2017, the Standing Committee thus adopted Recommendation No.... (2017) on biosafety measures for the prevention of the spread of amphibian and reptile species diseases.

5. Large Carnivores

During 2016-2017, the Convention continued to cooperate with its long term partners in the field of large carnivore conservation, namely Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE), WWF and the IUCN Cat's Specialist Group.

In 2016, the Convention contributed to the organisation of the LCIE meeting held in Porto, aimed at assessing large carnivore populations in Europe. General progress in the conservation status of most species was noted in Europe over the past 5 years. The Iberian lynx is less threatened and the wolf, Eurasian lynx and bear populations are progressing, with some worrying exceptions remain, including the lynx in the Balkans, in the Dnaryic area, in the Alps and the Bohemian-Bavarian population. Poaching of large carnivores in Austria and of lynx in the Bohemian-Bavarian population is concluded as a threat to the recolonisation of large carnivore in parts of the Alps.

Importantly, in 2017, following a proposal submitted by Albania to list the Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) in Appendix II of the Bern Convention, the critically endangered species will benefit from a stronger protection status. The decision to proceed with the inclusion was adopted at the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee in December 2017 and will become final on March 8 2018, unless one-third of the Contracting Parties have notified objections by this deadline.

Highlights on large carnivore conservation in 2016-2017:

- Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) listed in Appendix II
- Revised Strategy for the conservation of the Caucasus Leopard

In 2017, the Convention continued to closely cooperate with the IUCN Cat's Specialist Group and the WWF to enhance leopard conservation in the Caucasus. As a follow-up to the October 2014 Expert Workshop on assessing the implementation of the "Caucasus Leopard Strategy", in 2017, the Convention contributed to the organisation of a second Expert Workshop, aimed this time to consider the necessary revision of the Strategy.

The revised Strategy for the conservation of this critically endangered species was endorsed by the Standing Committee at its 37th meeting and Parties concerned confirmed their commitment to targeted conservation actions for the species, developed alongside the recommended measures in the revised strategy.

6. Biodiversity and Climate Change

The Programme of Work of the Bern Convention on Climate Change and Biodiversity, adopted in 2015, supported the identification of actions to be implemented during the biennium 2016-2017.

The level of implementation of the Convention's recommendations in the field², adopted since 2009, is considered as highly insufficient and variable from one Party to another. At its meeting in 2016, the Group of Experts on Climate change and biodiversity agreed that it is timely that reporting on the implementation of the Bern Convention standards in the field is monitored through an action-oriented system, supporting further action by countries.

In 2016, the Standing Committee agreed to establish a Restricted Group of Experts composed of 5 delegates from Contracting Parties and 5 experts from civil society organisations and partner institutions. Its role is to streamline action by Parties in the field of biodiversity conservation in the face of climate change by facilitating the practical implementation of the Bern Convention Programme of Work. The Restricted Group will meet in alternate years with the full governmental designated Group of Experts.

At its first meeting, taking place in 2017, the Restricted Group agreed that the assessment or re-assessment of Bern Convention species vulnerability is to be a main priority for the Convention. The Group studied the available vulnerability assessment methods and identified the most appropriate one to be used for the purposes of the Convention.

In order to support the urgent implementation of existing guidance at national level, the Group started the development of a new reporting format on Parties' past action, focussing on outcomes, looking into both qualitative and quantitative information on progress and enabling learning between Parties. The reporting is to take place every two years, starting from 2018.

Additionally, the Restricted Group of Experts explored the opportunities for closer cooperation and synergies development between the Bern Convention and the Council of Europe EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement. Working on the dissemination and expansion of the use of nature based-solutions to natural disasters is one of the issues of common interest for both instruments.

In the next biennium, the implementation of the above mentioned three priorities will be sought, also through the organisation of a joint meeting, in 2018, of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks and the Group of Experts on Climate Change and biodiversity.

Highlights on climate related action in 2016-2017:

- Preparation of a new reporting format for measuring progress in Parties' action on implementing existing guidance in the field
- Enhanced cooperation between the Bern Convention and the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement considered
- Restricted Group of Experts established

² The eleven Bern Convention Recommendations in the field are suggesting around 60 specific actions on topics such as climate change adaptation and mitigation, climate change in mountain regions, in protected areas, on European islands, climate change and wild land fires, conservation translocations in the light of climate change, marine biodiversity and climate change, among others.

6. Awareness and visibility

Communication

The online presence of the Convention continued to be a priority during 2016-2017 with a major development of the biennium being the development and implementation of two successful social media Campaigns on pressing biodiversity conservation issues.

The first Social Media Campaign was implemented in 2016, focussing on the issue of the spread of Invasive Alien Species. This was the first time that a Social Media Campaign targeting this particular topic had been launched. Under the motto “If you like it, craft it!” the campaign encouraged people to create their own Invasive Species craft. The idea was to engage the wider public under a positive and constructive message. Famous DIY (Do It Yourself) youtubers produced beautiful crafts and shared their Tutorials on Youtube. The campaign highlighted the dangers of exotic species and aimed to involve citizens in the fight against this major environmental problem.

Communication highlights in 2016-2017:

- Campaign ‘If you like it –Craft it’ – raising awareness on the spread of IAS
- Campaign #TheLastTweet – raising awareness on the Illegal killing of Birds phenomena

The second social media Campaign was implemented in 2017 and focussed on the IKB Phenomena in Europe. The Campaign allowed for the wider public to follow 4 migratory birds in their migration journey and witness its sad end as the birds are brutally killed, glued, shot or trapped in one of the Bern Convention Contracting Parties. The innovative campaign became a great success, with a big number of re-tweets and Facebook posts, as well as features in major European newspapers such as *El Pais*. Thousands of clicks on the accompanying Campaign webpage were registered. Importantly, the Webpage explains in detail the IKB phenomena, together with the action taken by the Convention and its partners.

Visibility

The Convention presented its activities at the following major events, including through dedicated Side Events:

- 4th meeting of the Eastern partnership panel on Environment and Climate Change, Brussels (26-27 May 2016);
- EU CGBN Meeting, Brussels (2 September 2016);
- IENE 2016 International Conference “Integrating Transport Infrastructures with living landscapes, Lyon (30 August – 2 September 2016);
- Thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 13), Cancun, Mexico (4-17 December 2016);
- 9th European Conference on the European Landscape Convention, Strasbourg (France), 23-24/03
- “Old growth forests in Europe” Conference by Wild Europe, Brussels (Belgium), 13-14/09/2017
- Platform meeting on Invasive Alien Species, Milan (Italy), (29-30 November 2017);
- 21st Meeting of the SBSTTA (CBD), Montreal (Canada), (11-14 December 2017).

7. Strategic partnerships and co-operation

During the biennium 2016-2017, the Convention continued to actively co-operate and coordinate its action with other stakeholders and organisations and, more particularly, collaborated with: the European Union, the CMS, the Ramsar Convention, the AEWA, the IUCN, the EEA and its ETC/BD, the UNEP-WCMC, BirdLife International, the FACE, the Large Carnivores Initiatives, the WildEurope Initiative and the Council of Europe EUR-OPA Agreement.