



- P R E S S R E L E A S E -

WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY 12-13 May 2007

U.N. Campaign highlights “Migratory Birds in a changing climate”

Bonn, 12-13 May 2007 -- A series of events will take place around the world this weekend to highlight the impacts of climate change on migratory birds. Over one hundred separate events in more than 48 countries will transmit the message of the 2007 World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) to local communities and across the globe. (www.worldmigratorybirdday.org)

“The message of World Migratory Bird Day is that we need to act faster to mitigate the effects of climate change on birds and our ecosystems!” said Mr. Robert Hepworth, the Executive Secretary of the global Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

The World Migratory Bird Day is being organised by the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) – two Bonn-based wildlife treaties administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

“We started WMBD with the aim to reach out to local communities worldwide; to provide them with an opportunity to raise awareness on migratory birds, and to promote local and international action towards their conservation,” said Mr. Bert Lenten, the Executive Secretary of AEWA and initiator of the World Migratory Bird Day campaign.

Referring to this year’s World Migratory Bird Day theme, Dr. Mike Rands, Chief Executive of BirdLife International said that: “there is overwhelming evidence that our planet’s climate is changing, disrupting vital ecosystems and the key services they provide for us all. For migratory birds, all of which are dependent on a multitude of habitats, climate change is of immense concern.”

“The ecological effects of a changing climate will have significant consequences for the conservation of migratory waterbirds. As they undertake their annual migrations, these birds use sites in many countries. Changes to any of these may jeopardise their ability to complete their migration. The implications of climate change on waterbirds needs urgent attention.” stated David Stroud a Senior Ornithologist at the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Facing these concerns is an issue for all countries and territories. AEWA and the WMBD partners are encouraging as many people as possible to take part. “Our policies can only be successful if we also convince the local communities of the urgency of this issue. WMBD was initiated for this purpose and I hope that with the help of all those concerned we will be able to make this initiative grow,” added Mr. Lenten.

Local and international cooperation are key elements for the success of the campaign as well as mitigation policies. “Clearly, the possible long term effects of climate change on migratory birds can only be solved if there is close cooperation on the level of the whole flyway and good cooperation between countries”, said Dr. Gerard C. Boere, an expert in international waterbird conservation policy and the author of several studies on the subject.

Note to Editors

World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) will highlight that migratory birds, from songbirds to raptors and from waterbirds to farmland birds, will be increasingly affected in many different ways by global warming. The impact on bird habitats resulting from the effects of climate change is already predicted to be dramatic. Coastal wetlands, extremely important habitats for many migratory birds will, for instance, be threatened by sea level rise. Progressing desertification results in the expansion of ecological barriers, for example, for black storks (*Ciconia nigra*) and other long-distant migrants crossing the Sahara desert.

The **Arctic region** is one clear example of a very important bird habitat, which is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Not only is the Arctic a critically important breeding ground for many migratory birds, it is also the origin of almost all major migration routes, so called flyways. Here, rising temperatures result in a steady expansion of forests, which are replacing the melting tundra habitat and dramatically reducing the needed habitat for breeding geese and sandpipers. “Arctic migratory birds are hit by climate change twice, on the flyway stop over sites and by changing conditions in the Arctic breeding grounds!” said Dr. Christoph Zockler, an expert on Arctic biodiversity, migratory waterbirds and climate change at the UNEP World Conservation and Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

Coinciding with WMBD, the AEWA Secretariat has commissioned a **comprehensive study on the effect of climate change on all 235 migratory waterbird species** covered by the international treaty in Africa and Eurasia. “The study will be conducted by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and will pull together the currently available scientific evidence and modelled patterns of the impact of climate change on those species covered by AEWA. In terms of identifying international research needs, it will show us what we currently know, what we do not know yet and what we can realistically do to mitigate the effect of climate change on waterbirds and their habitats,” explains Sergey Dereliev, the Technical Officer working for AEWA, with regard to the study financed through a grant by DEFRA.

There is growing evidence that climate changes are leading to alterations in length, timing and path of migration routes. In extreme cases, birds are abandoning migration altogether”, said Dr. Marco Barbieri, Scientific Officer at the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). “While on one side this indicates some ability of birds to adapt to changes, the consequences of these alterations are difficult to predict, and are potentially catastrophic. For example, migration cycles of birds need to be synchronized with a number of other biological cycles – e.g. of other species on which birds feed - at stopover and destination sites. If this synchrony will be disrupted, as there is evidence is already happening in some cases, birds might simply not find enough food and starve” he added.

Sites across a migratory range critical to the survival of migratory birds should be linked together in **coordinated networks** an example of which is the Western/Central Asian Site Network for the Siberian Crane and other Waterbirds under the CMS Siberian Crane MoU, which will be a contribution to the proposed Central Asian Flyway Site Network. It is also vital that we grow the global family of agreements for migratory birds, particularly by establishing a legal and institutional framework for the Central Asian Flyway which would help to anchor the site network.

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For more information & press material please see:

<http://www.worldmigratorybirdday.org> (PRESS SECTION)