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# Waterbirds around the world

A global overview of the conservation,  
management and research of the  
world's waterbird flyways

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*Cover photography:* Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* arriving at Martin Mere, England. Photo: Paul Marshall.  
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## The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds

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### ABSTRACT

The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) – an agreement developed under the aegis of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals – was concluded in The Netherlands in June 1995 and entered into force in November 1999. The geographical coverage of the Agreement extends from north-eastern Canada and Arctic Siberia to the southernmost tip of Africa, and includes 119 countries. The Agreement adopts a flyway approach, and provides for co-ordinated conservation action to be taken by the Range States throughout the migration systems of the 235 species of waterbirds to which it applies. By the end of 2006, 58 countries had joined the Agreement. This paper gives a brief history of the Agreement and reviews the progress that has been made in its implementation. Recent

activities relating to sustainable hunting, the African waterbird ringing scheme, climate change and avian influenza are discussed. The paper concludes by looking at some of the future challenges for the AEWA and emphasizing the need to strengthen co-operation with other multinational environmental agreements and organizations.

### INTRODUCTION

The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) is the largest of its kind hitherto developed under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). It was concluded on 16 June 1995 in The Hague, The Netherlands, and entered into force on 1 November 1999 after the required number of at least fourteen Range States, comprising seven from Africa and seven

**Table 1.** Contracting parties to the Agreement on the conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds as at the end of 2006.

Contracting Party	Date of entry into force	Contracting Party	Date of entry into force
<b>Eurasia</b>		<b>Africa</b>	
Albania	01-09-2001	Sweden	01-11-1999
Belgium	01-06-2006	Switzerland	01-11-1999
Bulgaria	01-02-2000	Syria	01-08-2003
Croatia	01-09-2000	Ukraine	01-01-2003
Czech Republic	01-09-2006	United Kingdom	01-11-1999
Denmark	01-01-2000	Uzbekistan	01-04-2004
European Community	01-10-2005	Algeria	01-10-2006
Finland	01-01-2000	Benin	01-01-2000
France	01-12-2003	Congo (Brazzaville)	01-11-1999
Georgia	01-08-2001	Djibouti	01-05-2004
Germany	01-11-1999	Egypt	01-11-1999
Greece	14-05-1998*	Equatorial Guinea	01-12-1999
Hungary	01-03-2003	Gambia	01-11-1999
Ireland	01-08-2003	Ghana	01-10-2005
Israel	01-11-2002	Guinea	01-11-1999
Italy	01-02-2006	Guinea-Bissau	01-11-2006
Jordan	01-11-1999	Kenya	01-06-2001
Latvia	01-01-2006	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	01-06-2005
Lebanon	01-12-2002	Mali	01-01-2000
Lithuania	01-11-2004	Mauritius	01-01-2001
Luxembourg	01-12-2003	Morocco	19-11-1997*
Macedonia FYR	01-02-2000	Niger	01-11-1999
Moldova	01-04-2001	Nigeria	01-07-2004
Monaco	01-11-1999	Senegal	01-11-1999
Netherlands	01-11-1999	South Africa	01-01-2000
Portugal	01-03-2004	Sudan	01-11-1999
Romania	01-10-1999	Tanzania	01-11-1999
Slovakia	01-07-2001	Togo	01-11-1999
Slovenia	01-10-2003	Tunisia	01-10-2005
Spain	01-11-1999	Uganda	01-12-2000

\* Date of signing; ratification is still pending

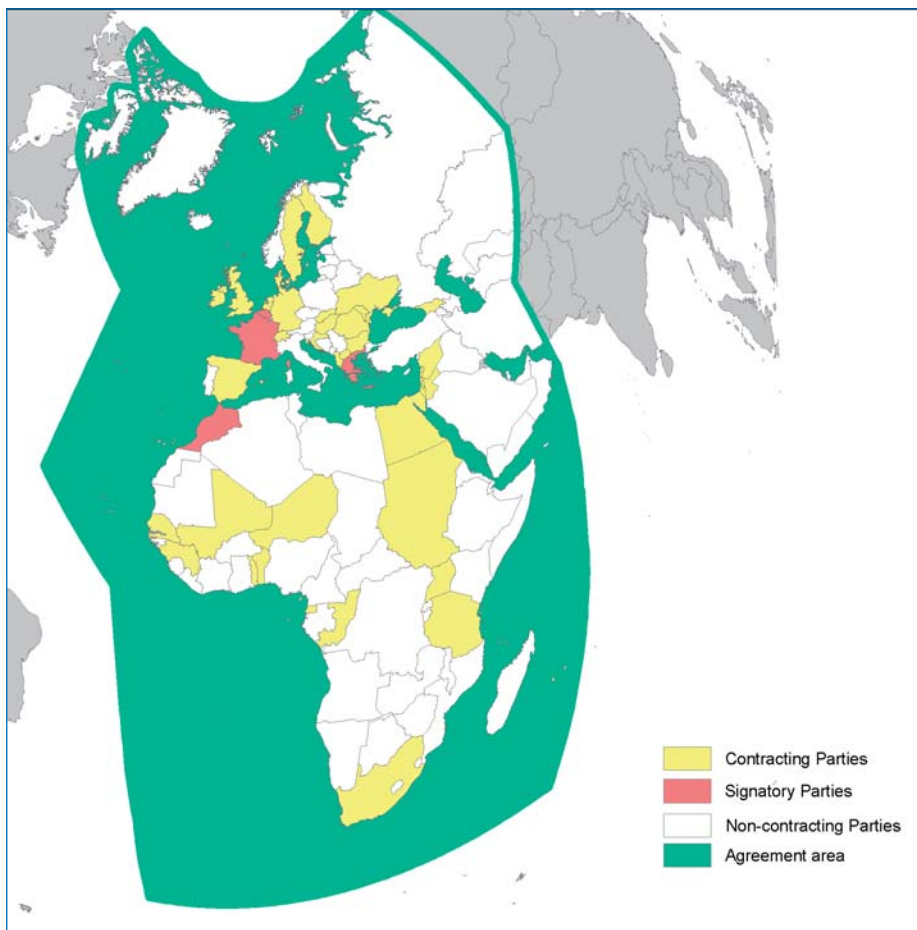


Fig. 1. Area of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA).

from Eurasia, had ratified. Since then, the Agreement has been an independent international treaty.

The AEWA covers 235 species of birds ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle, including many species of divers, grebes, pelicans, cormorants, herons, storks, rails, ibises, spoonbills, flamingos, ducks, swans,



Fig. 3. Tenth anniversary celebration and opening ceremony of the AEWA exhibition “Impressions of travelling birds” by the Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Mr. Jürgen Trittin, at the Museum Alexander Koenig in Bonn, Germany, on 4 July 2005. Photo: Sergey Dereliev.

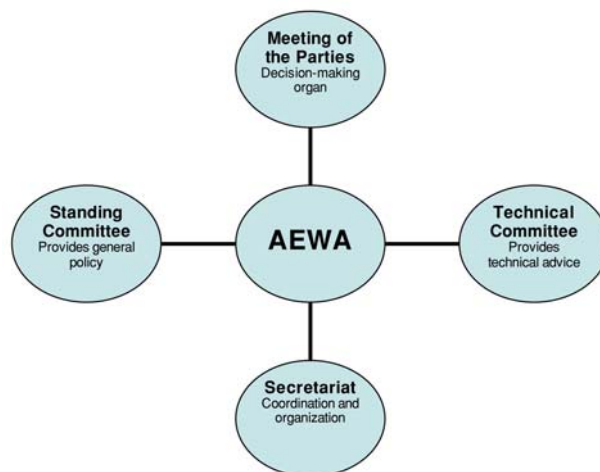
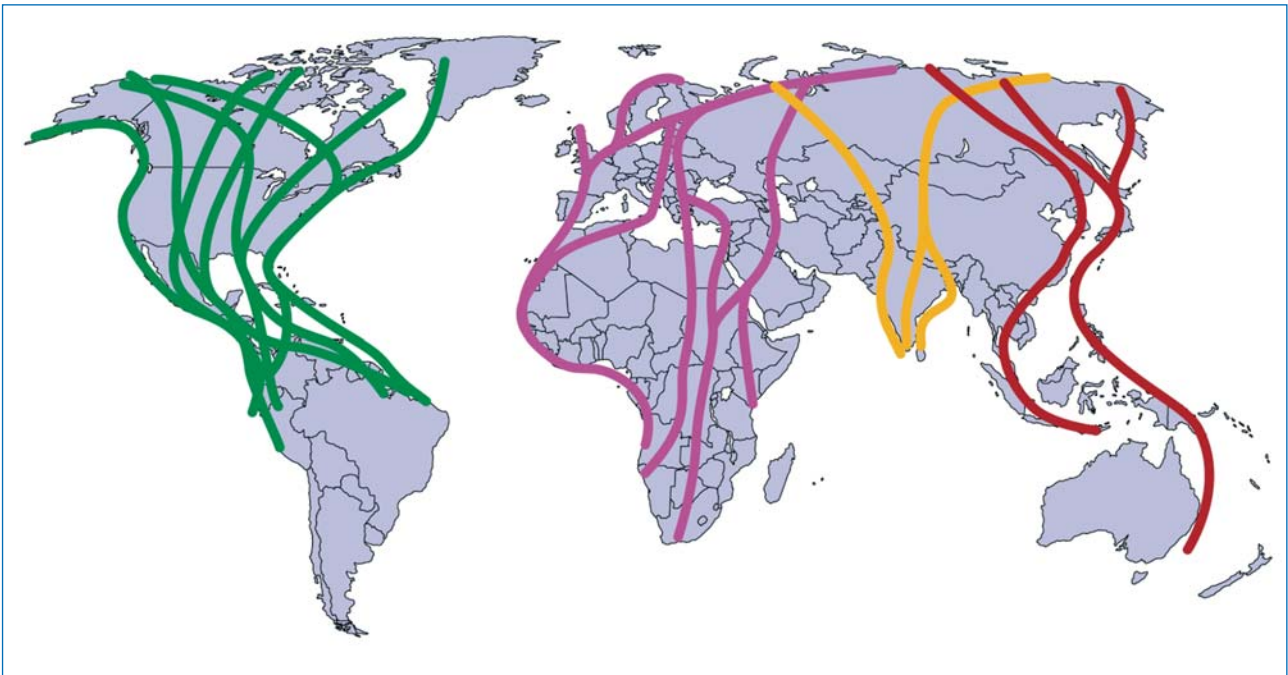


Fig. 2. Subsidiary bodies of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA).

geese, cranes, waders, gulls, terns and even the African Penguin *Spheniscus demersus*.

The Agreement covers 119 countries in Europe, parts of Asia and Canada, the Middle East and Africa. In fact, the geographical area of AEWA stretches from the northern reaches of Canada and the Russian Federation to the southernmost tip of Africa. The Agreement provides for co-ordinated and concerted action to be taken by the Range States throughout the migration system of the waterbirds to which it applies. Of the 119 Range States, 58 coun-



**Fig. 4.** The principal flyways of migratory waterbirds breeding in the Northern Hemisphere. (Note that many waterbirds migrate in directions other than those indicated here (Boere & Stroud, this volume, p. 40)).

tries have joined the AEWA, Guinea-Bissau being the latest Contracting Party as of 1 November 2006 (see Fig. 1 and Table 1).

Parties to the Agreement are called upon to engage in a wide range of conservation actions which are described in a comprehensive Action Plan (2006-2008). This detailed plan addresses such key issues as: species and habitat conservation, management of human activities, research and monitoring, education and information, and implementation.

After the conclusion of the Agreement on 16 June 1995, an Interim Secretariat was established. The first Meeting of the Parties (Cape Town, South Africa, November 1999) decided to establish a permanent Secretariat integrated in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and co-located with the Secretariat of the CMS in Bonn, Germany. This materialized in mid-2000.

To support and oversee the implementation of the Agreement, two subsidiary bodies have been established, namely the Technical Committee and, after the Second Meeting of the Parties (Bonn, Germany, September 2002), also a Standing Committee (Fig. 2). The latter took over all matters relating to policy, governance, administration and finance.

In 2005, AEWA celebrated its 10th Anniversary (Fig. 3). Although the Agreement is still relatively young, it has already proven to be quite successful. Thanks to support given by the European Union, Denmark, France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom, good progress has been made with the implementation of the Agreement. Much more could, of course, be done, but as always, lack of resources is the main bottleneck in this respect.

A welcome development will be the implementation of the African-Eurasian Flyways GEF (Global Environment Facility) project, which began in late 2006. This project has been designed by Wetlands International in close co-operation with BirdLife International and in consultation with the Ramsar Bureau and the AEWA Secretariat, and will be implemented by

Wetlands International and BirdLife International within the next five years. The main focus of the project will be on capacity building, co-operative research and monitoring, and communication activities.

#### FLYWAY APPROACH

In the mid-1980s, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries (LNV) in The Netherlands decided to take the lead in drafting the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds. Being a Contracting Party to the CMS, The Netherlands felt that it was one of their obligations to support the CMS in developing such a regional agreement for migratory waterbirds. Waterbirds are of extreme interest for The Netherlands which, being located more or less in the middle of the East Atlantic Flyway, provide breeding grounds for several species of waders that overwinter in West Africa, as well as wintering areas for geese that breed in the high Arctic. Furthermore, LNV was convinced that conservation of migratory species is only possible through international co-operation and therefore strongly promoted the “flyway approach”.

As noted above, implementation of the AEWA is well underway. One of the success stories is that the “flyway approach” (Fig. 4) has been widely accepted not only by experts, but also by decision makers and policy makers. It is clear that for the conservation of migratory birds, international co-operation is needed. Without co-operation, all efforts made to conserve a species in country A could be in vain if, for example, unsustainable taking is accepted in country B. The flyway approach means that all the threats that a particular species encounters during its migrations between its breeding grounds and its wintering areas are identified and tackled, or at least mitigated, through international co-operation of the countries along the flyway. This concept is easy to understand even for non-experts, which is the reason why the AEWA Secretariat has been able to raise more awareness and to convince many countries to join the Agreement.

The AEWA is the first multilateral environmental agreement dealing with the conservation of migratory waterbirds. It is seen as a model that could be replicated within the CMS framework in other regions of the world.

### AEWA ACTIVITIES SINCE THE EDINBURGH CONFERENCE

Since the Waterbirds around the world conference, the AEWA has been active on a range of issues addressed in Edinburgh. The Third Meeting of the Parties took place in October 2005 in Dakar, Senegal, and adopted 20 Resolutions – thus paving the way for further development of the Agreement. The Parties strongly endorsed the concluding statement of the Waterbirds around the world conference, and committed themselves to the implementation of the Edinburgh Declaration (this volume).

#### Sustainable hunting

In order to raise awareness among hunters and the relevant authorities on the issue of lead poisoning, the AEWA Secretariat planned several workshops on this subject, one of which took place in Senegal in October 2004. This workshop was organized in close co-operation with ONCFS, Wetlands International, CIC, OMPO, FNC and the Government of Senegal, and adopted 11 recommendations dealing with topics such as improving waterbird surveys and the setting of quotas for the number of birds that may be harvested. Two more workshops are planned for 2006 and 2007. These will be jointly organized with BirdLife International and will take place in Lebanon and Tunisia.

#### African Waterbird Ringing Scheme

Ringing studies in Europe have contributed greatly to our current understanding of waterbird migration and ecology. In order to develop an African Ringing Scheme (AFRING) which, it is hoped, will provide long-term international co-ordination between the various ringing schemes in Africa, the AEWA Secretariat supported the first AFRING waterbird ringing course, which was held in September 2004 in East Africa (Kenya). The next course is planned for Ghana in 2006.

#### Waterbirds and climate change

The impacts of climate change on migratory waterbirds are an important and complex issue that the AEWA will have to deal with in future in order to develop policies that adapt waterbird conservation to changes in climate. A desk study was suggested at the Third Meeting of the Parties; this will summarize understanding of the current and future responses of migratory waterbirds to actual and predicted climate change, and practical means of adaptation.

#### Avian influenza

The Third Meeting of the Parties also responded to the recent spread of the Asian lineage of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) subtype H5N1, and emphasized the need for national surveillance and monitoring mechanisms, especially in African countries, as well as for international co-operation in order to identify and eliminate HPAI H5N1. The Parties stressed the key role of the AEWA as a member of the International Scientific Taskforce on Avian Influenza, which has been set up under the auspices of the CMS, in disseminating information and scientific assessments related to the developing situation.



Launch of World Migratory Birds Day at Laikipia, Kenya, 9 April 2006. Photo: David Stroud.

### FUTURE OF THE AEWA

According to the United Nations, there are 191 sovereign states world-wide. Taking into account that 119 Range States are located in the AEWA region, it is clear that we have to deal with a very complex situation. Nowhere else on the globe do birds have to cross so many political borders. These borders make no sense for the birds, but could have an impact on their chances of survival. One of the challenges for the Secretariat is to convince more Range States to join the Agreement in the near future. The number of Contracting Parties is 58 (as of November 2006), and several more Range States are in the process of joining. However, this means that approximately 60 Range States still have to be convinced of the benefits of joining the Agreement.

Another issue is the question of whether the scope of the Agreement should be broadened in the sense of geographical and species coverage. Both options have been in discussion in the subsidiary bodies of the Agreement for several years, and will be a major issue for the next decade.

Last but not least, a challenge will be to increase the implementation of the Agreement. A great deal has already been achieved, but much more remains to be done. The recent Third Meeting of the Parties has shown that a major challenge for the AEWA is to strengthen co-operation with other multilateral environmental agreements and organizations. Current incidents such as the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 require prompt reaction. This implies close co-operation with other organizations, particularly non-governmental organizations which have the means and mechanisms to implement short-term projects. Moreover, the discussions on the impacts of climate change have made it clear that waterbird conservation needs to be dealt with as one aspect of nature conservation in general, rather than in isolation, and that adaptive policies have to be developed in close co-operation with other agreements and key partners. The AEWA is ready to contribute to the 2010 target as set by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002) to reduce the current rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010. This can, of course, only be achieved by putting all our efforts together.