



Global nature conservation advice



JNCC provides authoritative, science-based advice on issues concerning global nature conservation and plays a key role in international agreements and conventions

A range of multilateral conventions and agreements govern global nature conservation or have an influence upon it. The UK is party to a number of these Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) – see the ‘at a glance’ guide on page 16 – and JNCC provides technical advice to Government on their development and implementation. We also advise UK Government, devolved administrations and the country conservation bodies on the implications of international agreements for nature conservation at home and within the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories.

Major meetings involving contracting parties to MEAs take place, typically, at three-yearly intervals. 2008 was a landmark year, with several Conferences of the Parties to MEAs taking place during the year.

The ninth Conference of the Parties to the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** was held in Bonn, Germany, in May 2008. JNCC provided a team of four staff led by Paul Rose, JNCC's Head of Biodiversity Information, to provide technical support to the UK delegation. Other JNCC staff were involved in side events and meetings.

The CBD is one of the three global conventions born out of the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 and provides an international framework for conservation of biodiversity and its sustainable use. In 2002, contracting parties adopted a target of significantly reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

The Conference in Bonn was attended by 191 contracting parties and it agreed new measures to increase the world's network of protected areas and to negotiate international rules on fair access to genetic resources. Other outcomes from Bonn included the creation of a climate change expert group, a call for a sound policy framework on biofuel production, and enhanced activity in the areas of marine conservation, invasive non-native species and global environmental assessments.

A CBD capacity-building workshop for south and east Asian nations was held in Tsukuba, Japan, in December 2008 to help participating countries prepare national reports on progress towards CBD targets. The UK was invited to take part to share its experience of the use of indicators in the assessment of progress towards CBD goals, and JNCC's Jessamy Battersby attended the workshop. JNCC has contributed to work led by Defra to produce indicators – such as bird population trends and distribution of non-native species – to measure the UK's own progress, which were published as *Biodiversity Indicators in Your Pocket 2007*, and as an online update in 2008 (www.jncc.gov.uk/biyp).

The 10th Conference of the Parties to the **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands** was held in Changwon, South Korea, in October 2008. David Stroud and Jessica Magnus from JNCC provided scientific support to the Defra-led UK delegation. Among the Conference's outcomes was a resolution that compiles technical and policy guidance on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1, which was also a subject of resolutions at meetings of the Convention on Migratory Species and its African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement. The emergence and spread of new animal diseases, such as HPAI H5N1, is increasingly recognised as an issue that has implications both for nature conservation and human well-being, and which needs to be addressed at an international scale.

JNCC's David Stroud has been closely involved in development of a 'roadmap' for the technical and policy guidance related to HPAI H5N1 produced during recent years.

The Ramsar Conference also endorsed new guidance for land managers aimed at reducing the risk of HPAI infection at wetland nature reserves. Another resolution noted alarm at "continuing decline in the abundance of many waterbirds throughout the world" resulting from unsustainable exploitation and the loss and degradation of wetland habitats.



Ramsar winner

In 2008, Joint Committee member Dave Pritchard was presented with the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award and Evian Special Prize for science at the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention. The award was a recognition of Dave's work in supporting the development and implementation of the Convention over the last two decades.

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Migratory waterbirds and climate change

Golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

The impact of climate change on waterbirds was one of the subjects discussed at the Meeting of the Parties to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) in Madagascar in September 2008, and is covered in the AEWA publication *Migratory Waterbirds and Climate Change*, which was authored by ornithologists from the British Trust for Ornithology and Wetlands International, which is based in the Netherlands.

The study highlights a range of impacts, including sea-level rise, changes in the timing of biological events and changes in rainfall. For example, golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria* chicks thrive on the larvae of craneflies, but evidence suggests that availability of cranefly larvae is now out of step with golden plover egg-laying as a result of the changing climate.

Chicks © Paul Hobson/naturepl.com

Adult © Juan Carlos Munoz/naturepl.com

JNCC also attended the fourth Meeting of the Parties to the **African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)** in Madagascar in September 2008. The meeting acknowledged that the status of migratory waterbird populations in the area covered by the Agreement – Africa, the Middle East and western Eurasia – is poor. It recorded alarm at the “continuing decline in abundance of many waterbirds throughout the world”. Despite international targets to reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010 (see Convention on Biological Diversity above), monitoring evidence suggests that for waterbirds the rate of loss has accelerated. The main causes of loss were identified as:

- habitat loss and degradation;
- unsustainable harvesting of birds;
- use of toxic lead shot; and
- climate change impacts.

The AEWA meeting called for immediate action to address issues raised, and a range of responses were identified as priorities. They include improved international co-operation on conservation of shared migratory waterbirds and fully-funded action plans for the most threatened species.

In December 2008, the ninth Conference of the Parties to the **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)** was held in Rome. James Williams of JNCC and Colin Galbraith of Scottish Natural Heritage provided scientific support to the UK delegation. Key resolutions included action to reduce the impact of climate change on migratory species, the creation of an international taskforce on wildlife diseases, and recognition of emerging evidence of the impact of noise on marine species.

A second inter-governmental meeting on international co-operation on the conservation of migratory sharks under CMS took place in Rome in December 2008, and the UK, whose delegation included JNCC's Tom Blasdale, was one of 51 states represented. Building on the outcomes of a previous event in 2007, the meeting considered

possible texts for a CMS instrument on sharks. There was a consensus that the new instrument should be a Memorandum of Understanding and that its objective should be to achieve and maintain ‘favourable conservation status’ for migratory sharks and for their habitats.

The Memorandum is expected to apply to three species that had previously been listed on CMS appendices – the basking shark, the great white shark and the whale shark. However, no agreement was reached about four further species. Work is now being undertaken to put in place the Memorandum's fundamental principles and a conservation and management plan. The instrument is expected to be open for signature before the end of 2009.

Another development under CMS saw 27 countries agree the final text of an international agreement to conserve endangered migratory birds of prey in Europe, Africa and Asia at an inter-governmental meeting held in Abu Dhabi in October 2008. Eagles, falcons and osprey are among the species that will benefit from the new treaty, which will set out a legal framework for protection and create a funding mechanism for conservation work.

For the The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), JNCC continued to advise Defra on licence applications (around 20,000 per annum) for CITES-listed species regulated under European legislation. We also contributed to the development of Government policy by continuing to provide sound scientific advice in this area of work.

Wildlife conventions and agreements – at a glance guide

The UK is a party to a number of wildlife conventions and agreements at global, regional and European levels. Conventions are international agreements between countries that deal with subjects of common concern. They include:

The Convention on Biological Diversity

Also known as CBD or the Biodiversity Convention

Date: 1992 (Ratified by the UK in 1994)

Purpose: To support the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of resources and the equitable division of the benefits from use of genetic resources.

www.cbd.int

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

Also known as World Heritage Convention

Date: 1972 (Ratified by the UK in 1984)

Purpose: To encourage identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage considered to be of outstanding value.

www.whc.unesco.org

The Convention on the Conservation of Wetlands of International Importance

Also known as the Ramsar Convention

Date: 1971 (Ratified by the UK in 1976)

Purpose: To provide a framework for international co-operation for the conservation of wetlands.

www.ramsar.org

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

Also known as CITES

Date: 1975 (Ratified by the UK in 1976)

Purpose: To ensure that no species of plants and animals are subjected to unsustainable exploitation through trade. CITES now accords protection to more than 30,000 species.

www.cites.org

The Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Also known as the Bonn Convention

Date: 1979 (Ratified by the UK in 1985)

Purpose: To protect wild animals and birds that migrate across national borders. It provides a framework for the agreement of other instruments to protect species or groups of species. The UK is a party to the following CMS instruments:

- Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats (EUROBATS);
- Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS);
- Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA);
- Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS);
- Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP);
- Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Conservation Measures for Marine Turtles of the Atlantic Coast of Africa;
- Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia;
- Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Conservation Measures for the Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*;
- Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia.

www.cms.int

The Oslo and Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic

Also known as the OSPAR Convention

Date: 1992 (Ratified by the UK in 1988)

Purpose: To conserve marine ecosystems and safeguard human health by preventing and eliminating pollution, protecting against adverse effects of human activities and encouraging sustainable use of the seas.

www.ospar.org



Whale shark
Rhincodon typus

One of the migratory shark species at the centre of discussions at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species in Rome in 2008 was the whale shark, the world's largest fish, which can grow to more than 12 metres in length.

Whale sharks feed on plankton and they swim huge distances across tropical and warm temperate seas, possibly following the food supply. The sharks are to be found around coasts as far afield as those of Australia,

India, South Africa and Mexico; in some locations they are present all year round, while in others they visit only at specific times.

Large and slow-moving, the whale shark is vulnerable to harpoon fishing and its population is thought to be in decline. It is rated as 'vulnerable' by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

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