

FOURTH MEETING OF SIGNATORIES TO THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY BIRDS OF PREY IN AFRICA AND EURASIA

(Victoria Falls, 30 November- 2 December 2026)

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EXPLORING THE EXPANSION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE OF THE RAPTORS MOU

(Prepared by the Coordinating Unit)

Summary: This document summarizes the interim report of the analysis of the geographic coverage of Annex 1 species relative to the current geographic scope of the Raptors MOU (Annex 2). An initial assessment identified 45 species not fully covered by the current Agreement Area; the interim analysis has to date quantified the coverage gaps for 35 of these, including nine Category 1 species (two Critically Endangered, two Endangered, three Vulnerable and two Near Threatened). The document highlights the conservation value of improved geographic coverage and of expanding the pool of potential Signatories. The Meeting is invited to mandate the Coordinating Unit, with the support of the Technical Advisory Group and the COP-Appointed Councillor for Birds, to finalise the analysis for all 45 species,

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Background

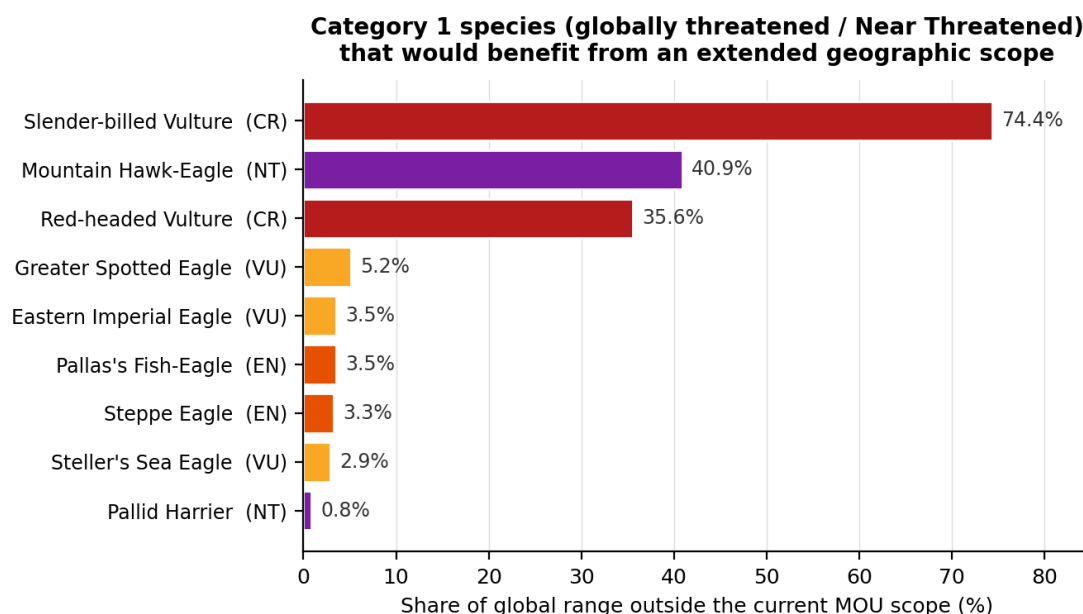
1. The mandate to develop the Raptors MOU derives from Recommendation 8.12, *Improving the Conservation Status of Raptors and Owls in the African-Eurasian Region* (UNEP/CMS/Recommendation 8.12, Nairobi, November 2005). It is important to recall that Recommendation 8.12 calls upon Parties, non-party Range States and other stakeholders to engage in cooperative activities for migratory raptors and owls in the African-Eurasian region, and to consider whether a CMS instrument would better deliver these objectives, without prescribing any geographic limitation on such an instrument. The boundaries of the present Agreement Area were not set by the mandate itself but emerged from the subsequent negotiating process.
2. The geographic scope eventually agreed at the negotiating meetings in 2007–2008, and set out in Annex 2 to the MOU, was based on biogeographic and pragmatic considerations: it covers the Afrotropical realm, a partial Palearctic realm (excluding Japan and the Korean Peninsula) and a partial Indomalayan realm (including South Asia and southern China), but excludes East and Southeast Asia and Australasia. The exclusion of the eastern Asian flyway countries was justified at the time on grounds of practicality and on the assessment that extension would bring insufficient additional benefit for migratory raptors, an assessment that the present analysis does not support.
3. Any extension of the geographic scope would require, alongside the political will of the current Signatories and of the potential new Range States concerned, an amendment of Annex 2 (geographic scope) in accordance with the procedure set out in the MOU Text. It could also entail an amendment of Annex 1 (species covered), should additional species qualify for inclusion as a consequence of the enlarged Agreement Area, and, as a result, of Table 1 in Annex 3 (the Action Plan), which categorizes the species listed in Annex 1.

Interim Results of the Gap Analysis

4. An initial assessment undertaken by the Coordinating Unit, with the support of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and the COP-Appointed Councillor for Birds, identified 45 Annex 1 species whose global ranges are not fully covered by the current geographic scope of the MOU. This document summarizes the interim report of the detailed, GIS-based analysis of these species, which to date has quantified the coverage gaps for 35 of the 45 species – out of 95 currently included in Annex 1), using distribution data from BirdLife International and the IUCN Red List. The analysis of the remaining ten species is ongoing.
5. Of the 35 species analysed to date, twelve have a major coverage gap, with 20 per cent or more of their global range lying outside the current Agreement Area; five have gaps of 10–20 per cent; three of 5–10 per cent; and fifteen of less than 5 per cent. In aggregate, some 72.8 million km² – approximately 8 per cent of the combined global range of the 35 species – falls outside the current scope,

principally in East and Southeast Asia, Japan, the Korean Peninsula ('Scope B') and, for four wide-ranging species (Black Kite, Osprey, Oriental Hobby and Peregrine Falcon), Australasia ('Scope C').

6. Nine of the 35 species are Category 1 species (globally threatened and Near Threatened species, as defined in Table 1 of Annex 3): two Critically Endangered (slender-billed vulture *Gyps tenuirostris*, with 74 per cent of its range outside the current scope, and red-headed vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*, 36 per cent), two Endangered (Pallas's fish-eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* and steppe eagle *Aquila nipalensis*), three Vulnerable (greater spotted eagle *Clanga clanga*, eastern imperial eagle *Aquila heliaca* and Steller's sea eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*) and two Near Threatened (pallid harrier *Circus macrourus* and mountain hawk-eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis*, 41 per cent). The remaining strongholds of the two Critically Endangered vultures lie largely in Southeast Asia, entirely outside the current Agreement Area.



7. Being an interim report, these figures should be regarded as a minimum: the completion of the analysis for the remaining ten species is expected to add further coverage gaps, and the full study, once finalised, will be made available as an Information Document.

The Value of Improved Coverage and of an Expanded Pool of Signatories

8. Improved geographic coverage would deliver clear conservation benefits. It would bring the entire annual cycle of East Asian migrants – such as the Amur falcon (*Falco amurensis*), grey-faced buzzard (*Butastur indicus*) and the Asian sparrowhawks (*Accipiter soloensis* and *A. gularis*)– within the Agreement Area, consistent with the flyway-scale, whole-population approach that underpins the MOU Action Plan; it would enable the MOU, and the CMS Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures implemented under it, to formally engage the Range States on which the survival of the two Critically Endangered vultures now depends; and it would align the geographic scope of the MOU with that of the Vulture MsAP.

9. Expanding the geographic scope would also substantially enlarge the pool of potential Signatories. The addition of the East and Southeast Asian flyway countries – and, under a wider option, Australasia – would open the MOU to a significant number of new Range States, broadening the political and financial base of the instrument, strengthening cooperation along the East Asian flyways, and increasing the visibility of the MOU as the principal intergovernmental framework for migratory raptor conservation across the whole of Africa, Eurasia and beyond. Several of the potential new Range States are already Parties to CMS or engaged in related frameworks, providing a favourable basis for outreach.

Next Steps

10. Before any amendment proposal is put to Signatories for decision, three strands of work are required: (i) the completion of the gap analysis to cover all 45 species identified by the initial assessment; (ii) an investigation of which additional migratory raptor species, currently not listed in Annex 1, would qualify for inclusion as a consequence of an expanded geographic scope, with any consequential changes to Table 1 in Annex 3; and (iii) structured outreach to the potential new Range States to explore their interest in joining an expanded Raptors MOU. Given the scientific and institutional dimensions of these questions, the advice of the CMS Scientific Council should also be sought. The outcome of this work, together with a fully elaborated amendment proposal including administrative and budgetary implications, would be presented to the Fifth Meeting of Signatories (MOS5).

Recommendations

The Meeting of Signatories is invited to:

- a) note the interim report of the gap analysis summarized in this document, and in particular that, of the 45 species identified by the initial assessment as not fully covered by the current geographic scope, the 35 species analysed to date include nine Category 1 species (two Critically Endangered, two Endangered, three Vulnerable and two Near Threatened);
- b) recognise the conservation value of improved geographic coverage and the institutional value of expanding the pool of potential Signatories to the MOU;
- c) mandate the Coordinating Unit, with the support of the Technical Advisory Group and the COP-Appointed Councillor for Birds, to finalise the gap analysis to include all 45 species;
- d) further mandate the Coordinating Unit, with the same support, to investigate which additional species, currently not listed in Annex 1, should be considered for inclusion as a result of an expanded geographic scope, including any consequential amendment of Table 1 in Annex 3;
- e) further mandate the Coordinating Unit to reach out to the potential new Range States concerned, to explore their interest in becoming part of an expanded Raptors MOU;
- f) request that the advice of the CMS Scientific Council be sought on the scientific aspects of the proposed extension; and

- g) request the Coordinating Unit to report on the outcome of this work, together with a fully elaborated proposal for the amendment of Annex 2 and, as appropriate, Annexes 1 and 3, including administrative and budgetary implications, to the Fifth Meeting of Signatories.

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