

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)

UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS4/Doc.13.3

INTERNATIONALLY IMPORTANT RAPTOR AREAS (IIRAs)

(Prepared by the Coordinating Unit)

Summary: This document informs Signatories of the adoption by the Conference of the Parties to CMS, at its 15th Meeting, of Resolution 15.10 and Decisions 15.175 to 15.178 on Internationally Important Raptor Areas (IIRAs), which build directly upon the list of internationally important sites established under the Raptors MOU. It recalls the role of the Technical Advisory Group in developing and applying the identification criteria and invites the Meeting to take note of the IIRAs and to support their further identification.

INTERNATIONALLY IMPORTANT RAPTOR AREAS (IIRAs)

Background

1. The Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU) calls upon Signatories, in paragraph 8(d) of its text, to “identify important areas, significant routes, breeding and congregatory sites for birds of prey and promote their protection and/or appropriate management, rehabilitation and/or restoration”. The protection and management of important sites is likewise one of the six Objectives of the MOU’s Action Plan.
2. When the Raptors MOU came into effect, Table 3 of Annex 3 contained a ‘Provisional list of Important Bird Areas that are currently known to be important congregatory bird of prey sites in Africa and Eurasia’. Annex 3 expressly stated that the indicative list should be treated as a minimum list of internationally important areas.
3. Acting on the mandate given to it by Signatories, the Technical Advisory Group of the Raptors MOU (TAG) undertook a comprehensive revision and expansion of Table 3. The exercise was conducted between the first and third Meetings of Signatories (MOS1 to MOS3) through successive rounds of consultation with experts, Signatories and Cooperating Partners, so as to ensure that the resulting list is scientifically rigorous, reflects the updated list of species covered by the MOU and incorporates broad regional input.
4. The revised list – renamed ‘List of internationally important sites for migratory birds of prey in Africa and Eurasia’ – was approved by Signatories at MOS3 (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 3 to 6 July 2023) and is contained in Table 3 of Annex 3 to the Raptors MOU. It comprises Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) and Special Protection Areas designated under the European Union’s Birds Directive that host one or more raptor species listed in Annex 1 of the MOU, together with sites proposed by Signatories that meet the IBA criteria. With more than 7,500 sites listed across the geographic scope of the MOU, it constitutes the most extensive network of internationally important sites ever assembled for migratory birds of prey.
5. At MOS3, Signatories also considered the results of a pilot site network analysis carried out by the TAG on a representative subset of eleven Annex 1 species (document UNEP/CMS/Raptors/MOS3/Doc.12.2). The Meeting agreed that the analysis provided considerable value in strengthening the comprehensiveness of the network and that it should be expanded to all other Annex 1 species and, resources permitting, to all species listed under the MOU. That mandate is reflected in Action 13 of the TAG Workplan 2023-2026.

Adoption by CMS COP15 of Resolution 15.10 and Decisions 15.175 to 15.178

6. The Conference of the Parties to CMS, at its 15th Meeting (Campo Grande, Brazil, 23 to 29 March 2026), considered document UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.26.8 *Internationally Important Raptor Areas (IIRAs)*, prepared by the Secretariat on the basis of the work carried out under the Raptors MOU. The Conference of the Parties adopted Resolution 15.10 *Internationally Important Raptor Areas (IIRAs)* and Decisions 15.175 to 15.178, which are reproduced in Annex 1 and Annex 2 to the present document respectively.
7. By paragraph 1 of Resolution 15.10, the Conference of the Parties *decided* to establish IIRAs as areas internationally important for migratory birds of prey for those sites meeting the criteria used to identify Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas as recognized by the TAG, *including the sites already listed in Table 3 of Annex 3 of the Raptors MOU*. In consequence, the sites listed in Table 3 of Annex 3 to the MOU are recognized as IIRAs, without any further step being required of Signatories.

8. Resolution 15.10 further acknowledges that the criteria applied by the TAG are based on the globally standardized scientific criteria developed for identifying IBAs as described by BirdLife International; requests Parties and invites Range States, intergovernmental organizations and partners to support the identification and delineation of IIRAs, in particular for species listed in category 1 of Table 1 of the MOU's Action Plan, including Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), lappet-faced vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*), Rüppell's vulture (*Gyps rueppelli*) and steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*); recommends that such support engage national authorities and relevant regional and international organizations at an early stage; invites the Convention on Biological Diversity, other multilateral environmental agreements and international financial institutions to consider IIRAs as useful contributions to the determination of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and of other effective area-based conservation measures; encourages Parties and non-Parties to make use of the listed areas when designating protected areas and in spatial planning processes, including through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans; and requests the Secretariat to promote the value of IIRAs at the global level.
9. It is of particular note that the Conference of the Parties extended the scope of the approach beyond Africa and Eurasia. Paragraphs 5 and 7 of the Resolution invite Parties and non-party Range States, via the CMS Flyways Working Group, to establish similar processes and to consider applying the IIRA approach for the identification of internationally important sites for migratory raptors at the global level. Decisions 15.175(b), 15.176(c), 15.177 and 15.178(a) provide the corresponding operational steps. The methodology developed under the Raptors MOU is therefore intended to serve as the model for equivalent processes in other flyways.
10. Decisions 15.175 to 15.178 are directed, respectively, to Parties, to intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to the Scientific Council and to the Secretariat. Parties within the geographic scope of the Raptors MOU are requested to support the identification of new IIRAs by proposing new areas to the TAG; intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to contribute proposals and to provide support to the TAG; the Scientific Council is requested to support the TAG through the sharing of information and data; and the Secretariat is to inform Parties of newly identified IIRAs, facilitate consultation and coordination between the TAG and equivalent processes in other flyways, and report on implementation to the Conference of the Parties at its 16th Meeting.

IIRAs as an achievement of the Raptors MOU

11. The establishment of IIRAs constitutes a significant achievement for the Raptors MOU. It is the first occasion on which a network of sites developed under a CMS instrument for a taxonomic group of terrestrial migratory species has been taken up by the Convention itself and given recognition at the global level. The technical work commissioned, guided and quality-assured by Signatories over more than a decade has thereby acquired a standing well beyond the membership of the MOU.
12. The approach follows the precedents of Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) under CMS Resolution 12.13 and Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) under CMS Resolution 14.7. There is, however, an important difference: whereas the IMMA and ISRA processes are managed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the identification of IIRAs within the geographic scope of the Raptors MOU rests with the TAG, a subsidiary body of the MOU, under the oversight of the Meeting of Signatories. The Conference of the Parties has thus placed its confidence in a mechanism owned and governed by Signatories.
13. Recognition as IIRAs offers tangible added value to Signatories. It increases the visibility of the sites and of the habitat needs of migratory birds of prey; it supports the

determination of Key Biodiversity Areas; it provides a defensible, science-based evidence layer for the designation of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures and thus for the implementation of Targets 1 and 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans; and it strengthens the case for the consideration of raptors in spatial planning, in environmental impact assessment and in the appraisal of investment by international financial institutions.

14. In order to communicate this outcome to a wider audience, the Coordinating Unit has prepared an information brochure on IIRAs, which is made available to the Meeting as document UNEP/CMS/Raptors/MOS4/Inf.XX. Signatories are encouraged to make use of the brochure in their national outreach and in their engagement with site managers, planning authorities and partners.

The role of the Technical Advisory Group

15. Under its Terms of Reference, the TAG provides scientific and technical advice to Signatories and ensures that changes in taxonomy, conservation status and knowledge of the movements of migratory raptors are reflected in the lists annexed to the MOU. The revision and expansion of Table 3 was carried out under that mandate and was, in terms of volume of work, one of the largest tasks the TAG has undertaken.
16. The membership of the TAG includes a representative of BirdLife International, the organization responsible for the IBA programme. This ensures full and continuing adherence to the IBA criteria and consistency between Table 3 and the global IBA and KBA datasets – a point expressly acknowledged by the Conference of the Parties in paragraph 3 of Resolution 15.10.
17. Under the Rules of Procedure for Meetings of Signatories, sites may be proposed for inclusion in Table 3 by any Signatory, using the Site Proposal and Amendment Form adopted at MOS3, or by the TAG itself. The TAG is tasked with verifying that each site proposed meets the identification criteria and with providing written comments on each proposal tabled. Any amendment to the list is approved by the Meeting of Signatories. Following the adoption of Resolution 15.10, this established procedure is also the procedure by which IIRAs are identified within the geographic scope of the Raptors MOU.
18. The continued capacity of the TAG is therefore a direct determinant of the rate at which IIRAs can be identified, both within the geographic scope of the MOU and, through the sharing of methodology, in other flyways. Actions 3, 13 and 15 of the TAG Workplan 2023-2026 – respectively the review of site proposals, the site network analysis covering all relevant Annex 1 species, and the assessment of the protection status and effectiveness of the sites listed in Table 3 – are all classified as core or very high priority activities and remain dependent upon the availability of voluntary contributions.

Supporting further identification of IIRAs

19. Two documents before the present Meeting provide the evidence base for the next phase of work. The Site Network Analysis (document UNEP/CMS/Raptors/MOS4/Doc.XX), prepared in response to the mandate given at MOS3, extends to the remaining Annex 1 species the methodology tested in the pilot analysis. It identifies those parts of the range of each species for which the network is incomplete and distinguishes genuine gaps from those explained by the non-congregatory behaviour of the species concerned. It therefore constitutes a direct work programme for the identification of further IIRAs.
20. The Conservation Status Assessment Report (document UNEP/CMS/Raptors/MOS4/Doc.XX) provides, in accordance with Action 15 of the TAG

Workplan, an overview of the protection status of the sites listed in Table 3 and a measure of their effectiveness, alongside an updated assessment of the conservation status of the species listed in Annex 1. Read together, the two documents indicate both where new IIRAs are most needed and where existing IIRAs require improved protection and management.

21. Signatories are accordingly invited to submit proposals for new sites, using the Site Proposal and Amendment Form available on the Raptors MOU website, giving priority to the gaps identified in those two documents and, in particular, to the species listed in category 1 of Table 1 of the Action Plan. Information on the protection status of listed sites should likewise be reflected in national reports.

Discussion and analysis

22. The adoption of Resolution 15.10 and Decisions 15.175 to 15.178 places a mandate of the Conference of the Parties behind work that Signatories have already carried out. It requires no new obligation of Signatories in respect of the sites already listed, which are recognized as IIRAs by operation of the Resolution itself. Its practical significance lies in the leverage it offers: a site recognized under a CMS Resolution carries greater weight in national planning processes, in negotiations with other sectors and in applications for conservation finance than a site listed in an annex to a non-binding instrument alone.
23. At the same time, the Resolution and Decisions increase the expectations placed on the Raptors MOU and on its TAG, which are now looked to as the technical reference for a process that the Conference of the Parties intends to extend globally. Meeting those expectations will require that the site network analysis be completed, that the flow of site proposals from Signatories increase, and that the TAG be resourced accordingly.
24. It is also recalled that not all Signatories to the Raptors MOU are Parties to CMS, and that Decisions 15.175 to 15.178 are addressed to Parties. Signatories that are not Parties are nonetheless invited to act in the same spirit, as the value of the network depends on its completeness across the flyway rather than on the treaty status of individual Range States.

Recommended actions

25. The Meeting is recommended to:
 - a) take note of this document and of the adoption by the Conference of the Parties to CMS, at its 15th Meeting, of Resolution 15.10 and Decisions 15.175 to 15.178 on Internationally Important Raptor Areas, reproduced in Annexes 1 and 2 to this document;
 - b) note that the sites listed in Table 3 of Annex 3 to the Raptors MOU are recognized as Internationally Important Raptor Areas;
 - c) welcome the contribution of the Technical Advisory Group to the development of the identification criteria and to the compilation of the list of internationally important sites, and confirm the role of the Technical Advisory Group in verifying proposals for the identification of further IIRAs within the geographic scope of the MOU;
 - d) invite Signatories to support the further identification of IIRAs by submitting site proposals using the Site Proposal and Amendment Form, giving priority to the gaps identified in the Site Network Analysis (document UNEP/CMS/Raptors/MOS4/Doc.XX) and to the needs identified in the Conservation Status Assessment Report (document UNEP/CMS/Raptors/MOS4/Doc.XX);

- e) invite Signatories that are Parties to CMS to implement Decisions 15.175 to 15.178, and encourage all other Signatories to act accordingly;
- f) encourage Signatories, Cooperating Partners and donors to provide the financial and technical resources required for the completion of the site network analysis and for the continuing work of the Technical Advisory Group; and
- g) request the Coordinating Unit, in cooperation with the Technical Advisory Group, to report to the fifth Meeting of Signatories on progress in the identification of IIRAs.

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