THE STEPPE EAGLE *(Aquila nipalensis)*

Steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) © Dau Lal Bohra

NAMES AND GENERAL TRAITS

- Scientific: *Aquila nipalensis*
- Arabic: عقاب السهوب
- English: Steppe eagle
- French: Aigle des steppes

The steppe eagle is a large dark brown plumage, yellow gape, and wide wingspan, long-lived migratory bird of prey found across open steppe grasslands and semi-desert ecosystems of the African-Eurasian region.

CONSERVATION STATUS

The steppe eagle is classified as Endangered by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species since 2015 due to widespread and rapid population declines across its range, requiring urgent international conservation action.

Under CMS and CITES, the species is classified as follows:

- CMS: Appendix I (since 2017) & II (since 1979)
- Raptors MOU: Category 1 (since 2008)
- CITES: Appendix II (since 1975)

POPULATION SIZE

The steppe eagle population estimates are below 30,000 breeding pairs globally.

Threats across the flyway

Across its range, the steppe eagle faces multiple interacting threats that collectively drive its decline. One of the most significant is energy infrastructure. Electrocution on unsafe powerlines and collisions with poorly designed or sited transmission systems and wind turbines are major causes of mortality, particularly along migration routes and at key congregation sites. These risks are heightened in regions where infrastructure expansion has not incorporated bird-safe designs.

Illegal killing, taking and trade also remain a persistent pressure. Steppe eagles are hunted and trapped in many parts of their range, and trade, including through online markets, continues to occur. These threats can have significant cumulative impacts on populations and are especially evident in the West Asia, North Africa and Southeast Asia, where law enforcement and awareness need to be strengthened.

Poisoning and exposure to contaminants represent another major concern. The species is vulnerable to pesticides, veterinary drugs such as NSAIDs, heavy metals and other toxic substances. This risk is amplified by their scavenging behaviour, particularly during migration and in non-breeding areas where they rely on carcass disposal sites and landfills. Ingesting contaminated food can lead to direct mortality as well as reduced fitness and breeding success.

Habitat loss and environmental change further compound these threats. Land-use change, shifts in prey availability and climate-related impacts are altering ecosystems across the species' range. These changes can reduce breeding success, particularly where declines in small mammal populations limit food availability.

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CONSERVATION NEEDS

The Steppe Eagle Global Action Plan has identified the most important conservation actions required:

- Addressing the decline of the steppe eagle requires coordinated action across its range, with a strong focus on reducing human-induced mortality. A key priority is mitigating risks from energy infrastructure by identifying high-risk areas such as migration bottlenecks and congregation sites, and ensuring that existing powerlines are retrofitted or replaced with bird-safe designs. Future infrastructure must also incorporate standards that minimise electrocution and collision risks.
- Efforts to reduce illegal killing, taking and trade need to be strengthened through improved enforcement and closer cooperation between governments, conservation organisations and law enforcement agencies, particularly in identified hotspot regions.
- Reducing poisoning is critical and requires further research into toxic substances such as pesticides and NSAIDs. Monitoring contamination pathways, especially around breeding and congregation sites, alongside safer waste management and carcass disposal, will help minimise exposure.
- Protecting and managing habitats across the steppe eagle range is essential to support viable populations. Key feeding and roosting sites, including landfills, should be managed to ensure they remain safe.
- Strengthening research, monitoring and international collaboration is fundamental, including standardised monitoring, improved data sharing and increased awareness to support effective implementation of conservation actions across the species' range.

DISTRIBUTION RANGE

Steppe eagles breed from Eastern Europe through Central Asia to East Asia, with Kazakhstan supporting the majority of the global breeding population.

Steppe eagles migrate along the Central Asian and African-Eurasian Flyways, passing through key bottlenecks to reach wintering areas in:

- The Arabian Peninsula
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- South and Southeast Asia

During migration and wintering periods, they rely heavily on predictable food sources such as landfills and carcass sites.

STEPPE EAGLE GLOBAL ACTION PLAN

The Steppe Eagle Global Action Plan (SEGAP) 2026–2035 provides a coordinated framework for conserving the species across its range. It aims to halt and reverse population declines through targeted, science-based actions and strengthened international cooperation among the 62 range states.

The Plan was developed through a consultative process involving Range States and international experts and was endorsed by the CMS Parties at COP15 (Brazil, 2026).

For more information, please visit:
https://raptors.cms.int/steppe-eagle-global-action-plan



Photos: Chick in nest (left © Ilya Smelansky); breeding habitat (middle © Albert Salemgareyev, ACBK); wintering adult steppe eagle (right © Andras Kovacs)

About CMS

The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, is an environmental treaty of the United Nations that provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory animals and their habitats.

CMS Instruments

Animals receive protection under CMS through listing on its two Appendices, through global or regional agreements and through action plans. The Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU) is the CMS instrument devoted to the conservation of this group of species.

هيئة البيئة - أبوظبي
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