THE EXPERIENCE OF UNEP GEF AND PARTNERS IN FLYWAY CONSERVATION
The drafting of this issue paper has been a highly participatory and collaborative process, in which many partners and donors have been engaged.
The "Flyway Approach" has become a key concept guiding the development of international initiatives for flyway-scale conservation covering many different migratory bird species in many parts of the world.

For the past several years, these international efforts to conserve migratory waterbirds have been given an unprecedented boost through the WOW Project and the Siberian Crane Wetland Project.

Both have become a model internationally for flyway initiatives in other regions showing how "The Flyway Approach" can be put into practice. These projects are a unique example of the broad partnerships that characterise UNEP’s support to multinational efforts in the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources.

The UNEP GEF team is committed to continue to support this approach, and the commendable efforts of all stakeholders in flyway conservation. We look forward to avenues for consolidating and expanding the scope of this and other recent successful flyway conservation initiatives in our UNEP GEF project portfolio. We are also glad to note that existing flyway conservation partnerships are being strengthened among key stakeholders, as a result of this and other recent efforts supported by the UNEP GEF: a good sign and a reason for optimism on the validity and potential of the flyway conservation approach.

The way ahead is complex, and challenges are increasingly difficult in the face of climate change and increased human-induced pressures on our planet.

Our direction is also increasingly clear, and new “flyway” projects are already on the drawing board for possible future funding by GEF and other donors, on the basis of our recent experience. It is our hope that these initiatives will lead to further investments in the wise-use of wetland resources and to better conservation of migratory waterbirds worldwide.

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United Nations Environment Programme


2. A third GEF Flyways project – the "Migratory Soaring Birds" project is executed by BirdLife International through UNDP. This is not formally part of this review, but lessons from staff engaged in both this project and WOW are included where appropriate.

3. Voice printing is a technique where individual birds can be identified by their unique vocal patterns without having to catch and band them. It has been tested on Red Crowned and Siberian Cranes.
and flyway levels. A modular "Flyway Training Kit" is now available and specifically designed to improve the capacity to understand and apply flyway-level conservation concepts. A wide range of conservation strategies for migratory waterbirds is also being effectively demonstrated at 28 field sites. Important targeted research on technologies such as satellite telemetry and voice-printing1, and regional training activities on topics such as data management, help ensure sound collection, maintenance and sharing of information across flyways. At the regional level, strong networks are being created among project sites and between countries along the same flyways.

Although regional planning and cooperation is an important pre-requisite for effective flyway conservation, field practice experience during both projects showed that this can only be achieved if local programmes cater for the existing shared interests of multiple stakeholders at the national and site levels: for example in managing water resources which sustain wetland ecosystem services for both waterbirds as well as economic functions such as fisheries, agriculture or hydropower supply.

This is even more important in the face of the impacts of climate change on these systems and services. Promoting flyway conservation from a combination of local, regional or trans-boundary perspectives, with emphasis on multiple conservation and socio-economic benefits rather than purely on bird conservation needs, has demonstrated greater chances of success especially in terms of engaging politicians and decision makers in conservation-oriented decisions.

The tangible activities and results of both projects have contributed greatly to our understanding of flyway-level conservation in all participating countries, and have stimulated political support for this approach. Significant interest has also been generated beyond the areas covered by these two "pilot" GEF projects. These results provide an excellent basis for the consolidation and expansion of flyway-level conservation work on a global scale, within the framework of the relevant Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) (including CMS, AEWA, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the Convention on Biological Diversity) as well as strategic alliances such as the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) or the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN). These activities are also being implemented in close collaboration with major international NGOs such as Wetlands International, BirdLife International, and the International Crane Foundation, as well as the UNEP/WCMC.

The innovative nature and management complexity of these multi-country and multi-stakeholder projects required a significant degree of adaptive management and patience, especially at their outset. In Section 5, some lessons learned are summarised, and some improved management measures are proposed. These lessons aim at facilitating the design, approval and implementation of new GEF flyway-level conservation initiatives, to be consolidated and expanded possibly even on a broader scale. In particular, section 5.1 covers emerging lessons related to the technical design and implementation of projects on flyways and migratory species. These focus on:

- Removing barriers and creating incentives to developing multi-national flyway conservation initiatives;
- Emphasising regional-level activities as they generate important and globally-relevant outputs;
- Developing well inter-connected flyway conservation activities at the site and national levels;
- Fostering support at the national level by taking into account the common issues and interests of stakeholder groups;
- Dedicating specific attention to factors affecting key sites at national and local levels that can threaten the integrity of entire flyways;
- Assigning proper value (and budget) to communication outputs.

Section 5.2 covers important emerging lessons with respect to project preparation, management, monitoring and evaluation. These issues appear to be common and relevant also to most other multi-country projects, and are therefore clustered into this section.

Section 6 outlines the comparative advantage of UNEP in terms of facilitating this type of multi-country initiatives. Section 7 provides a preliminary outlook at proposed new initiatives in the field of flyway-level conservation for possible GEF support from 2010, resulting from initial consultation with some of the partner organisations involved.

Two important and complex GEF-funded regional scale interventions in the field of flyway conservation are currently being implemented by UNEP GEF. Both projects are at an advanced stage of implementation at the time of writing, and are generating important outputs. Their main achievements include:

a. Broader cooperation established: both projects under review have clearly demonstrated the importance and the potential effectiveness of a hybrid partnership model for reaching important trans-boundary conservation objectives. Partners include the Secretariats of several Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements and existing international partnerships (such as the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership), various UN agencies, national governments as well as international and national NGOs.

b. Improved enabling environment: the projects facilitated the creation of new MEAs and actively contributed towards consolidating and implementing existing ones1, through practical

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5. Particular reference is made to the CMS (and relevant international MOUs under the CMS umbrella), AEWA, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, as well as the newly established East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership.
c. **Improved science base**: the innovative "Critical Site Network Tool" of the WOW project provides a basis for more effective flyway-level conservation planning in the African-Eurasian region. The first draft of this tool is available and a public launch is planned for 2010.

Significant advances have been made in our knowledge of waterbird flyways in West/Central and Eastern Asia through surveys, monitoring and satellite tracking research. Studies and plans concerning the water supplies needed to maintain or restore appropriate hydrological regimes, wetland ecosystem functions including support for biodiversity (especially migratory waterbirds) as well as the needs of local communities have guided local resource managers in taking appropriate decisions. These efforts have been supported by the development of GIS-based information management at different scales. Improved sharing of information has also benefited planning and conservation action.

d. **Improved national capacity for flyway conservation**: the capability of the national agencies responsible for coordinating national programmes concerning migratory waterbird monitoring and conservation and associated international cooperation including participation in related MEAs has been significantly strengthened through these projects.

e. **New tools for capacity building**: the first comprehensive multi-lingual "Flyway Training Kit" was developed in collaboration with over 40 training institutions across the African-Eurasian region. The first draft of this tool is available and a public launch is planned for 2010.

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**g. Best practice examples**: hands-on demonstration activities implemented at 28 sites spanning 16 countries at sites of global importance for the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats with, in most cases, approaches catering for the interests of multiple stakeholders.

6. Throughout the document the term "African-Eurasian region" is intended as the area covered under the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), covering 118 countries (www.unep-aewa.org).

7. UNEP GEF Wings over Wetlands "The flyway approach to the conservation and wise use of waterbirds and wetlands: a Training Kit" (2009, in press.).
The following short comparative table outlines the two UNEP GEF projects’ main features, implementation status and key achievements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>GEF IA</th>
<th>REGIONAL SCOPE</th>
<th>GEF BUDGET (US$)</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>EXECUTING PARTNERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The &quot;Siberian Crane Wetland&quot; Project (GEF ID 1097)</td>
<td>UNEP</td>
<td>4 countries</td>
<td>10,350,000 (12,358,000)</td>
<td>Ongoing, Phase I Complete, Phase II Closing in 2009, PIR rating 2008: &quot;5&quot;</td>
<td>UNEP/CMS, International Crane Foundation (ICF)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Objective: to secure the ecological integrity of a network of globally important wetlands that are of critical importance for migratory waterbirds and other wetland biodiversity, using the globally threatened Siberian Crane as a flagship species. The project focuses on the conservation of the international network of wetlands upon which the Siberian Crane depends throughout its migration cycle, together with a wide range of other wetland biodiversity. As of September 2009, twelve of these wetlands are Ramsar sites and nominations for four more are in preparation.

Area: flyways used by populations of Siberian Cranes in Western/Central Asia and in East Asia targeting 16 key wetland sites located in China, Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia.

Key Achievements: (a) measures for conservation of key flyway wetlands in place, including: legal protection, management plans, stakeholder participation mechanisms, monitoring programs for waterbirds, water, and vegetation, targeted research aimed at addressing key threats, assessment of water needs to maintain key sites and provision of environmental flows in regional water plans, increased professional capacity, public awareness and education programs, and alternative livelihoods projects; (b) national-level measures for conservation of flyway wetlands and migratory waterbirds in place in all four countries, with well developed flyway monitoring within Kazakhstan, eastern China and eastern Russia; and (c) international arrangements for flyway network conservation established under the framework of CMS and the EAAFP and strengthened capacity for coordination of flyway conservation programmes.

Expected Outcomes: enhanced conservation of migratory waterbirds and their critical sites in the African-Eurasian flyways. Activities will be strategic and catalytic in nature addressing the flyway-scale causes of site degradation and related species decline.

Area: Activities will benefit all 118 countries in the AEWA range (African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement). Demonstration projects are implemented in 12 countries. Sub-regional coordination activities are active in 6 countries.

Key Achievements: (1) The network of sites of critical importance to migratory waterbirds will be identified and existing data / information resources improved and linked to create an innovative “Critical Site Network tool” (CSN) for flyway planning and management in all 118 AEWA range states. (2) The first multi-lingual Flyway Training Programme developed and tailored to four sub-regions, providing the basis for individual and institutional capacity development. (3) stakeholder communications improved, enhancing coordination and cooperation in the flyways between and within governments, research institutions and NGOs, and (4) best practice management showcased at demonstration projects in 12 countries, illustrating approaches and techniques for how to implement an array of wetland management activities in different environmental and social contexts. These include: participatory management planning, ecotourism, education and awareness, control of invasive/alien species, waterbird monitoring and research, and capacity building.

4. INTERNATIONAL ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The role of GEF-funded projects and most recent deliberations by relevant MEAs

These GEF-funded initiatives have provided an invaluable opportunity to demonstrate the innovative “flyway conservation approach”. Both UNEP GEF Flyways Projects have played a crucial role in strengthening the relevant international MEAs and strategic partnerships under whose umbrella they are implemented. The achievements and issues raised through both projects are stimulating increased political and scientific discussions on the flyway approach at the local, national, regional and global levels.

As a result, the role of relevant MEAs (i.e. AEWA, Ramsar, CMS etc.) focusing on flyway conservation has also been significantly strengthened in recent years. This impact of GEF support is demonstrated by increased MEA membership, implementation of coordination priorities with relation to the flyway approach, and increasingly active participation of member countries in flyway conservation initiatives. For instance, through SCWP a new site network has been established in West/Central Asia under the CMS MoU on the Siberian Crane which could lead the way towards the development of a wider waterbird site network for the Central Asian Flyway. This progress is also
reflected in the first publication by the CMS on major global flyways, offering an insight on flyway involvement worldwide, the recently concluded CMS MoU on Birds of Prey and the CMS COP9 resolution 9.2 on the formation of a specific international “working group” on flyways.

The two projects have also significantly supported enhanced national implementation capacity for international cooperation of waterbird flyway conservation commitments, notably under the Ramsar Convention’s guidelines on International Cooperation of waterbird flyways: (http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop9/COP9_Pre_final_res_rec_en.htm).

Additionally, through support of the GEF-projects, various new wetlands have been identified, documented and formally designated on the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Ramsar Convention. Examples include all four SCWP sites in Kazakhstan, and the first trans-boundary Ramsar Site ever nominated in Africa, the “Seloum-Niumi Complex” located at the border between Senegal and the Gambia (through the WOW Project).

Member countries of all concerned MEAs have recently formally underscored the importance of consolidating and expanding flyway-level conservation efforts for migratory birds and the habitats they depend upon. Recent MEA deliberations are to a large extent the direct result of the increased level of awareness and positive outcomes of the first flyway-level projects being implemented by several partners, with GEF support. Some key deliberations resulted from the following MEA or international agreements’ conventions (text in Annexes):11:

- The Convention of Migratory Species (CMS CoP 9 – Italy, December 2008)
- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar CoP 10 – South Korea, November 2008)
- Resolution X.22 Promoting international cooperation for the conservation of waterbird flyways: (http://www.ramsar.org/res/key_res_x_22_e.pdf)

5. MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

Some important lessons are emerging from the first GEF-funded flyway projects implemented to date, providing a basis for the design of new GEF initiatives. These lessons are summarised below, grouped under two main categories: (1) issues specifically related to the technical design and implementation of projects on flyways and migratory species, and (2) issues that may also be applicable to most other multi-country projects.

5.1 Technical design and implementation of projects on flyways and migratory species

5.1.1. Barriers to developing multi-national flyway conservation initiatives must be removed, and incentives created

New and complex technical approaches were conceptualised for both projects under review, always involving an important and very broad consultative process. Much of this was enabled through the financial support available through GEF Project Preparation (PDF-B) funds for national and regional stakeholder consultations, which are now more limited under the current funding rules of the GEF. The NGOs involved as Executing Agencies already had significant relevant prior experience in multi-country programmes on migratory birds. However the multi-level administrative complexity to the GEF and UN Implementing Agencies, with specific project design and implementation frameworks, added quite a significant, new and sometimes too inflexible set of requirements. This complexity entailed even longer project development periods than for normal GEF projects of equivalent size. Also the Resource Allocation Framework (RAF) approach followed under GEF 4 for biodiversity projects presented an obstacle to developing regional or multi-country projects such as these flyways projects.

Unsurprisingly, based on their experience with other projects during GEF 4, the recipient countries prefer to use their allocations towards priorities within the country. Countries have therefore often hesitated to join multi-country GEF projects, raising concerns about the overheads and costs for the regional or global component activities, largely based on doubts regarding the benefits of this approach. These perceptions made it difficult to support the necessary regional-level management, activities and advisory inputs to address international concerns that do not always fully coincide with single country needs.

From a technical perspective, the GEF has historically not placed much emphasis on species-targeted conservation projects, but has rather focused on projects with an integrated ecosystem management approach. The latter approach however posed particular challenges to the design of projects on migratory species, which straddle a wide range of biogeographic zones, habitats and field contexts.

Notwithstanding the above constraints, both flyway projects under review have proven that it is possible to gain the full support and commitment of multiple governments and local stakeholder groups alike. This support was mainly achieved through partnership building and awareness raising, emphasising the regional-scale inter-linkages between (wetland) sites and their key wildlife, their common management issues, and the shared interests found with stakeholders (such as on water needs). At the government level, these projects also created a somewhat competitive environment in terms of countries’ commitments under an MEA (e.g., in terms of establishing more Ramsar sites). The support and guidance provided by these GEF projects on species (e.g., the Siberian Crane), and sites and flyway management under these MEAs, has also greatly assisted in mobilising the right level of attention by central and local governments.

These species-targeted projects (or groups of species such as migratory waterbirds) have in effect provided a clear and tangible common subject for discussions and action to protect species, as well as the habitats and water resources which they depend upon. Cross-country learning approaches and dialogue supported by the two GEF projects have further strengthened the understanding and action on regional flyways and as such generated more global environmental benefits, than if this would have been conducted in a single-country environment.
The above issues have significant operational implications for GEF 5, and should be addressed by providing a more workable mechanism for the development of regional conservation initiatives on migratory species (and flyways).

**Recommendations:**

A set of measures should be put in place to remove barriers and provide incentives for countries to work together and join resources in addressing trans-boundary and multi-national conservation issues. These measures may, for example, entail:

- The development of a new GEF Biodiversity "Programme" on migratory species and flyways within the GEF Biodiversity Focal Area. This step would entail a specific funding envelope to cover regional or global programme costs, outside the RAF country allocations for specific national activities. This approach would (a) provide an additional source of funds and a sound programmatic framework for this type of complex multi-national projects, and (b) have the specific aim of encouraging, simplifying and fast-tracking the review and approval processes for these GEF interventions.

- Species (or groups of species) targeted conservation programmes can be effective and should be promoted, as long as they are designed to address the underlying economic and environmental issues, as well as to focus on the shared interests and concerns of stakeholder groups.

- A simplification and reduction of requirements in terms of country endorsements, co-financing commitments and supporting documentation that would also facilitate the project design and approval process.

- Encourage relevant MEAs (i.e., CMS, AEW and Ramsar Convention) to endorse such projects through their Standing Committees on behalf of, and with the mandate from, all signatory governments. This would significantly reduce the red tape burden and fast-track the project development phase.

- Allowing more flexibility on the definition of budgets and workplans at the project design and preparation stages (see also section 5.2.1), deferring detailed definition to the next stage, when the actual project implementation team and Steering Committee are in place.

- The development phase of all flyway projects is emerging from regional and national activities at the site and national levels, and ultimately supporting improved site-level conservation action.

The key to the success of a flyway approach lies in linking conservation work at local and national level with the international context. The most innovative and globally-relevant contributions of flyway projects are emerging from regional-level activities. The site-level and national-level conservation interventions implemented in the WOW demonstration projects or in the Siberian Crane Wetland Project were of a more traditional nature, while still employing the latest approaches and technology. These activities were influenced by international priority setting, but their information sharing and demonstration potential may have been increased when more explicitly linked to other local-level interventions in other parts of the flyway, resulting in a higher cumulative impact.

The regional-level approach was largely tested in the WOW project, where regional-level activities received a substantial share of the budget (though less than local demonstration projects). In itself, facilitating multi-national teams to interact and work together along flyways is proving an important basis for generating and strengthening the international networks of conservation practitioners that are essential to support flyway level conservation efforts. Good examples arise from multi-national collaborative work on common issues (e.g., the development of the "Flyways Training Kit" in the UNEP GEF WOW project, involving over 40 training institutions across the African Eurasian region, or the adoption of common water needs and wetland hydrology studies under the SCWP). In this context, the link to site-level action appears to be more effectively provided by the executing partners' own networks, that will anyway be directly benefitting from the GEF projects' regional-level outputs (see also the related section 5.1.3).

**Recommendations:**

New GEF flyway initiatives should support global and regional/multi-country types of projects, that provide the added value of linking work at sub-regional and national levels, and ultimately supporting improved site-level conservation action.

- These projects should design and deliver innovative and effective tools applicable at the flyway level (such as, e.g., the common flyway training platforms and spatial mapping/conservation planning tool developed in WOW for the African-Eurasian region).

- These new tools should be generated through interactive team work at the global and/or regional level, with contributions from multi-national and multidisciplinary teams.

- The important link with site-based activities should not, however, be lost in this approach (especially for critical sites). It can be maintained by ensuring that all new tools produced are effective to any extent tested through pilot projects within participating countries, including e.g., through expanding the network of critical sites along the flyway, as well as ensuring that the tools are demand-driven.

- **5.1.3. Develop well inter-connected flyway conservation activities at the site and national levels**

The two projects are rather different in their scope and emphasis, with the African-Eurasian Flyways Project covering a wider range of countries but with a stronger focus on developing regional tools with broad applicability. The Siberian Crane Wetland Project covered four countries along two
main flyways and, in this respect, showed how a more focused flyway effort – still spanning large distances but involving smaller numbers of countries and bird species – can achieve tangible outcomes that may be difficult for more complex and diverse projects involving larger numbers of countries. Both show the way forward with flyway projects, as complementary and valuable approaches.

The site-based demonstration projects represented an important component of both flyway projects under review (particularly for the SCWP, where approximately 80% of budget was allocated for site or national level activities). These activities provided good examples of site-based conservation work at sites of global importance for migratory birds, and provided an opportunity for testing new studies and management approaches for adoption elsewhere along the flyway (e.g. on wetlands’ hydrology, community-participation approaches, trans-boundary management of protected areas, etc.). They therefore certainly contributed to the conservation of globally important habitats and species and the integrity of flyways.

In future projects, the evolving flyway conservation approach will provide a more effective framework for (a) creating improved inter-linkages between sites along the same flyways, (b) focusing the selection of sites on the most critical ones along each flyway, (c) defining the most appropriate type of conservation interventions at each site, and (d) establishing new collaborative approaches between sites at various levels (and strengthening existing ones) including scientific, conservation, communication, legal and policy level interventions. Therefore in some cases, the selection of field sites for project intervention may best be carried out at a later stage - during project implementation - when the flyway planning tools can generate an optimal range of critical sites and management practices to be tested.

Recommendations:

- Site and national level activities in the framework of flyway-scale initiatives should focus as far as possible on the development, testing and demonstration of widely applicable methodologies and conservation tools.
- These should be conceived as joint efforts among several countries along a flyway (closer to the experience of the Siberian Crane Wetland Project), and include the development and application phases of innovative flyway-conservation approaches and tools shared by several countries.

These new initiatives will entail collaborative work at an identified multi-national network of sites comprising for example: increased trans-national collaboration on bird migration field research; harmonization of monitoring protocols along major flyways; joint application of flyway conservation planning and management tools (e.g. such as the WOW "Critical Sites Network" tool, combined International Waterbird Census / Important Bird Areas monitoring protocols); joint implementation of flyway training programmes at the sub-regional/flyway level; exchange programmes aimed at improving and harmonising policies and conservation approaches; joint awareness and education campaigns, etc. Where this approach has been implemented in both projects under review, great success was achieved in demonstrating the philosophy and practical application of flyway-level collaboration.

5.1.4. Do not underestimate the importance of fostering support at the national level by taking into account the common issues and interests of stakeholder groups

At the national level, the enabling environment for project implementation is an important factor for success. For example, within the framework of the Siberian Crane Wetland Project (SCWP) in China, the central government has increasingly recognized the importance of environmental protection and biodiversity conservation, manifested in terms of policies and related budget allocations for wetland restoration, watershed rehabilitation and ecological water demand considerations in water resource management. This was largely achieved when waterbird and flyways conservation issues were effectively combined with a dialogue on common issues such as on water use or socio-economic concerns affecting the sustainable use of the wetland sites as the basis for integrated wetland management. These policies and political support have provided the conditions for effective project implementation (e.g., the water management plans for sites in northeast China) and the delivery of substantial co-financing and associated financing. In contrast, the Russian Ministry of Agriculture’s decision to abandon management of all federal zakazniks (wildlife sanctuaries) under its control was a severe setback for project implementation at project sites in West Siberia. Stronger support from the federal Ministry of Natural Resources could have significantly enhanced impacts of this project, for example through official approval for the extension of flyway site networks.

Recommendations:

- At the project design stage, greater emphasis should be placed on the following aspects:
  - Identify and agree with key stakeholder groups on common concerns and interests, both in the field of ecology/conservation, as well as related socio-economic issues through focusing related socio-economic issues through focusing...
on key ecosystem services like water supply and regulation, fodder and fisheries production, hunting resources, etc. Project objectives and outcomes should cater to these ‘common-grounds’ through an ecosystem approach and not just the species conservation aspects, which would be too hard to sell.

- At project design, develop flexible implementation arrangements that provide a suitable framework to enhance and foster national ownership and government support for projects.
- During project implementation (especially at the start-up stage and following any changes in National Executing Agency (NEA) organization or staffing), emphasis should be placed on ensuring constant communication, information and outreach efforts with all relevant government bodies, to improve understanding of project objectives and foster government support (ref. also lesson 5.2.3).
- Greater flexibility in determining GEF national executing agencies (e.g., including sub-regional and/or local government bodies and NGOs) would allow for the development of more effective partnerships for project implementation. Within very large countries, this would allow interventions to be more precisely targeted at specific regions, especially where a fair degree of autonomy exists within regional government, and where ownership of the project may be stronger locally than at the central level.
- The involvement of NGOs as executing agencies (or partners) where possible would often strengthen delivery, for example where the relevant government agencies have limited staff resources or technical capacity, or where civil society involvement is an important prerequisite for the sustainability of project outcomes (for instance in the case of community co-management of flyway sites).

5.1.5. The integrity of entire flyways can be threatened by factors affecting key sites requiring specific attention at national and local levels

Experience during SCWP indicated that certain critical sites or clusters of sites may face threats that jeopardize the integrity of the flyway itself. Examples are Poyang Lake Basin, the main wintering ground for cranes and many other migratory waterbirds in southern China, where a dam proposal could radically alter the ecology of the entire basin; or wetlands in Songnen Plain of northeast China, essential staging areas at mid-point on the flyway that face the common threat of water shortage due to diversion and drought. Targeted research at appropriate sites can also inform about flyway level issues. For instance, collection and testing of dead birds at Yancheng – a key wintering area in Eastern China – could provide valuable information about the levels of toxic chemicals being carried by migratory birds.

In such instances, careful consideration should be given to including targeted interventions addressing these sub-regional or site-based threats to the flyway. The flyway dimension adds leverage to the resolution of such issues.

The SCWP also had significant positive results from national level flyway monitoring, information sharing, and exchange. This effort proved of particular importance in large countries (such as China and Russia) that have long and very important flyway segments encompassed within their own boundaries (which, for China, include both breeding and non-breeding or wintering areas for numerous significant bird populations). Therefore flyway-level activities are needed also at the national level, especially in large countries with significant internal flyways, ideally in combination with site activities.

Recommendations:

Interventions at critical flyway sites can have an international significance that goes well beyond their local setting. Such site and related national activities therefore have an important role to play in regional/global initiatives, helping to find workable solutions to common problems that can then be scaled up by national governments.

- Such interventions could either be framed as part of flyway level projects, or included as part of national level projects, in the context of a flyway conservation approach.
- If the latter course is followed, they should ideally be supported by a more synergistic approach to the programming of GEF interventions that takes into account flyway-level thinking.
- In this respect, it would be desirable to adopt a new GEF “Programmatic Approach” on migratory species and flyways within the GEF Biodiversity Focal Area. This change would (a) open up avenues for launching several local and/or national-level GEF projects developed under a cohesive programmatic framework, and interlinked with one or more international-level projects, (b) help provide the necessary incentive for participating countries (ref. Lesson 1) to engage in trans-boundary conservation efforts and (c) provide an appropriate framework for a greater cumulative impact of GEF interventions on a global scale.

5.1.6. Assign proper value (and budget) to communication outputs

The presentation, dissemination and discussion of project results provided a significant boost to most of the MEAs related to flyway conservation (namely CMS and AEWA as well as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands). However the project
resources allocated to communication and outreach efforts - to develop and cover most critical elements of a communication strategy - were in most cases underestimated at project design.

**Recommendations:**

- Hiring experienced communications staff to work closely with the project management and technical teams, so as to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of links with mass media through activities such as the development and dissemination of communication materials including website, publications, audio-visual products and press events as well as organising study tours to demonstration sites for groups of journalists.
- Therefore communications should always be considered as an integral part of the main GEF budget for projects of this type, and should not be left relying entirely on co-financing that may or may not entirely materialise.

**5.2 Management issues that are also relevant for most multi-country projects**

**5.2.1 PROJECT DESIGN: Mitigate the impact of lengthy project design phases by revising project strategy and approach at project start-up**

The design and GEF approval phase took an excessively long time for both projects (i.e., 3 to 5 years from concept to start of implementation). As a result, some components needed substantial re-design at the start of the project, to reflect the changed context and situation. Some important co-financing and promising partnership opportunities were lost, whilst the devaluation of the dollar significantly impacted the overall project budget.

Even with a simpler and faster design and approval phase (see section 5.1.1 above), project development is likely to be relatively lengthy, so an initial review of project design needs to be built in.

**Recommendations:**

The timely review and update of project logical frameworks and structure at project outset should become a mandatory task for the project management team, and:

- The review should be implemented not later than six months from the moment the project management team is in place.
- Funding for external facilitation should be allocated for this process as part of the budget.
- The team should look at and review the baselines, indicators, and targets in view of the evolved situation, and modify workplans and budgets accordingly.
- The revised logframe, workplan and budgets should be endorsed by the Steering 1 and adopted thereafter for project management and reporting.

**5.2.2. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS: Conduct a full “reality check” at project start-up**

The institutional and political complexity of this new multi-stakeholder approach has required a significant initial phase of set-up and testing of the institutional and implementation arrangements at the national and regional levels. The complex set-up agreed at project design stages often requires careful review and re-discussion at project outset based on realities on the ground.

**Recommendations:**

- The GEF Implementing Agency (IA – UNEP in the two projects under review) should be proactive in supporting the critical role of the Executing Agencies (EA) and liaising closely with the wider partnership necessary for effective flyways conservation, especially during the first year of project implementation.
- The IA should convene a dedicated meeting at project outset (i.e., when the project team is recruited and in place) to clarify and illustrate institutional and implementation arrangements, lines of reporting, and roles and responsibilities of all parties. At this stage the IA should be working closely with the international EA and all project partners in the review and clarification of the project implementation set-up, of the complex management, administrative and reporting requirements for GEF projects. The team should conduct a reality-check based on real-life project implementation examples, going beyond the sometimes too diplomatic and generic wording adopted in project documentation and TORs. This exercise should allow agreement and timely implementation of any necessary adjustments to the management set-up of the project, and lay the foundations for an effective project “Inception Workshop”. This important process aims at minimising the risk of misunderstandings and different interpretations by implementing partners, while adequately preparing the ground for smooth implementation and maximising synergies among the wide range of partners involved.

**5.2.3. MONITORING & EVALUATION (M&E): Revise Logical Framework and M&E plans at the project outset**

The significant delay between project design and actual implementation start-up results in logframes and M&E plans that inevitably need substantial revision at project outset and during the project lifetime (see also sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2). Identifying appropriate and SMART indicators for the outcomes of such large and complex projects was also extremely complicated, and sometimes required innovative approaches. The complex structure of flyway projects requires a streamlined approach to logframe design and indicators. Project documents included extremely elaborate logframes that attempted to cover everything, and in doing so became unusable.
agreement with UNEP, to address the lack of specific implementation guidelines. This manual was progressively updated and elaborated during the course of project implementation, and was used for other UNEP/GEF projects.

Language barriers (including the understanding of technical terms and related jargon) can also be significant in multinational projects, even though there are regional tendencies towards one or two major languages.

**Recommendations:**

The capacity of Executing Partners can and should be gradually improved through experience (as happened in both flyways projects under review), and:

- A mandatory and well-costed initial revision of the M&E plan should also be enshrined in the project document. This revision should focus on re-assessing the current baselines, actualising indicators, and re-defining realistic targets to account for the changed situation and time elapsed between project conceptualization and design / approval.

- Incorporate specific resources for M&E consultants/facilitators in the project budget, instead of leaving this important task to the project management teams.

5.2.4. Ensure that there are sufficient financial and human resources for adequate project management in partner organisations

Projects should include sufficient resources in the design phase and be prepared to support the strengthening of capacity to implement large UN-GEF projects in partner organisations.

Though project preparation involves capacity assessments, the complexity of administrative and management procedures with such multi-country GEF-funded UN projects often challenges EAs as projects start. As a consequence, the additional management capacity and staff time (as opposed to technical tasks) required for the successful management of such UN projects is often underestimated. The 10% project management fee available to EAs under current GEF rules is largely inadequate to support good management systems and practices. Such under-resourcing of partners’ management capacity may also have significant negative effects on the implementation of project technical tasks. For example, the Executing Agency for the Siberian Crane Wetland Project (SCWP) developed a Project Operations Manual in

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• Operational guidelines (i.e., such as the project Operations Manual developed within the SCWP) should be made available by the GEF Implementing Agencies at the outset of new projects, simplified and fine tuned to the conditions and needs of each particular project and supported by a basic orientation/training workshop.

• Other materials (e.g., templates and examples of project management documents from other projects) should be made available in appropriate languages via a resources website.

• Quality-based selection criteria should be applied in choosing the lead Executing Agencies. The Executing Agency teams (at every level) must include staff with demonstrated project management skills and experience. Assuming that this is the case may often be wrong and can lead to significant management problems during implementation. In the African-Eurasian Flyways Project (WOW) this issue was addressed by involving UNOPS as the Executing Agency, with UN staff placed within the lead NGO. Although expensive and complex (i.e., requiring significant initial clarification of the respective TORs and mandates between the EA and executing partners), this approach provided important direct management support and coordination functions for the lead NGOs and for all the wide range of partners involved in technical delivery. For the Siberian Crane Wetland Project (SCWP), quality-based staff selection criteria were discussed and agreed with National Executing Agencies. However, in some cases these were not accepted by countries due to issues with autonomy, and this led to sometimes suboptimal staff capacity, requiring various management corrections in the national project coordination units later through the project. However, in the case of WOW, the direct management functions assigned to UNOPS staff may have had higher value if (a) combined with sufficient resources for project management in the lead NGOs and (b) more explicitly combined with capacity-building on management aspects, so as to facilitate project implementation and maximise the immediate and long-term benefits for partners involved. Both approaches required a significant lead-time at project outset to set adequate management arrangements in place, and this need should be taken into consideration during project design.

• There is a general expectation that international projects will be undertaken in one major language (English in the case of the two projects under review). However, allowance should be made for the two-way translation of materials as part of normal project operations. This adjustment is particularly necessary in the African-Eurasian and Pacific regions (where language diversity is high), or where national contacts need to work with local colleagues associated with demonstration sites and other activities. This process means extra time and cost, especially where written documents require translation, which should be incorporated into project workplans and budgets. There is also the issue that much of the available literature on advanced conservation subjects (e.g., guidelines produced by MEAs and international NGOs) is only available in a few major languages. International projects can make a significant contribution by supporting the translation of such materials into additional languages. This support would certainly be welcomed by the related MEAs.

5.2.5. Set-up an active and balanced Steering Committee early on

Involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, with sometimes differing agendas and priorities, adds significantly to the complexity of project implementation. A well-balanced and closely engaged Steering Committee (SC) is essential for such multi-stakeholder and multi-donor initiatives. Depending on circumstances, it may also be useful to have sub-governance structures such as a smaller Executive Committee to support more rapid decision-making or a Technical Review Panel to conduct peer review of plans and essential outputs.

Recommendations:

• The GEF Implementing Agency (IA) should take a proactive role and lead responsibility for facilitating and overseeing the timely establishment of a balanced Steering Committee within the first six months of the project.

• The critical choice of the Chairperson of the SC should be taken by consensus among all partners and facilitated by the GEF Implementing Agency, so as to ensure that the SC provides a neutral forum for discussion, where the views and expectations of all partners in the project may be heard and discussed openly and on a regular basis (with at least annual face-to-face meetings combined with periodic tele-conferences if required), in order to provide timely guidance and feedback to the project implementation team.

• While project management is not its job, the Steering Committee may need to be quite ‘hands on’ in detecting and tracking problems, and providing support and guidance in resolving them. Where logistics make this difficult, setting up smaller, subsidiary structures, such as an Executive Committee or Technical Review Panel, may be a workable approach, but this must be handled carefully so as not to risk undermining the Steering Committee’s overall governance functions.
• Allowing more generous estimates for procurement, staffing and contracting, and/or the adoption of a “contingency” budget line to provide a buffer for currency fluctuations.
• Systematically allowing for annual increases of project running costs over the project period, or
• Striving towards a currency balance between GEF funds (provided in USD) and cash co-financing in other major currencies (e.g., the Euro), so as to balance the risk of currency fluctuation.

5.2.7. Envisage realistic overall project management costs

Actual overall project management costs appear to be systematically under-estimated at project design stage. This tendency has a serious negative impact on the smooth implementation of projects: apparent savings on management costs that are set at project design can later negatively affect the quality and timeliness of delivery of the entire project intervention. In particular, regional or multi-country projects such as the ones under review have significantly greater management costs than do less complex projects. This specific characteristic of multi-country initiatives was not adequately accounted for at the project design stage. See also section 5.2.4 on ensuring adequate management budget within the project executing agencies.

Recommendations:
A pragmatic and multi-pronged approach is recommended, which may entail:
• Adopting a basket of currencies as a basis for budget estimations, or defining the project budget on the basis of the currency in which most project expenditure is likely to be incurred.
• Allowing more generous estimates for procurement, staffing and contracting, and/or the adoption of a “contingency” budget line to provide a buffer for currency fluctuations.
• Systematically allowing for annual increases of project running costs over the project period, or
• Striving towards a currency balance between GEF funds (provided in USD) and cash co-financing in other major currencies (e.g., the Euro), so as to balance the risk of currency fluctuation.

5.2.8. During project design, mitigate the potential impact of failing to secure anticipated co-financing

In some cases, essential core activities were negatively affected throughout the project duration by the uncertainty of co-financing, or by co-funding commitments that did not materialise within the project life span.

Recommendations:
• Complex and inter-mixed financing arrangement ratios for specific activities (combining GEF funds and co-financing from multiple sources into one activity) should be avoided altogether or at the very least avoided for core activities that are considered critical for project success.
• If possible, assign co-financing to activities that do not impact on critical tasks, and hence do not seriously jeopardise the overall chances of success of the project, as a strategy to minimise negative effects, should pledged funds not materialise.

5.2.6. Mitigate the impact of currency fluctuations at project design stage

The value of the US dollar can fluctuate significantly (in some cases up to 40%) between design and start-up phases. This issue applies to most large development projects of this nature, which may be affected to a variable degree. In the case of the WOW project, currency fluctuations had a negative impact and required significant revisions of budgets and workplans throughout project implementation. Therefore, where possible, adequate mitigation measures should be put in place at the project design stage.

Recommendations:
• The establishment of a simple e-mail forum for individual projects is a low cost mechanism for facilitating discussion and sharing of information between SC members and partners, as well as facilitating informed decision-making among steering committees.
• A more comprehensive and realistic estimate of actual management costs should be accepted by the GEF, taking into account the complex needs of multi-level and multi-country initiatives, and possible currency fluctuations.
• Prior consultation with the relevant human resources teams of the executing agency is essential to allow a better estimation of actual staff costs.
• Annual inflationary increases of management costs should be enshrined in the budgeting process and some flexibility allowed to reflect changes in management costs through annual budget revisions.

Biodiversity Issue Paper BD/001: The Experience of UNEP GEF and Partners in Flyway Conservation

© Marko Valker (Southern Dunlin)
© Crawford Prentice (Chabda, Yakutia) © Jim Harris (Student camp Xianghai National Nature Reserve)
UNEP is the GEF Implementing Agency with direct involvement in two out of three major Flyways projects implemented so far with GEF support, as discussed in this paper. The African-Eurasian Flyways Project is by far the most complex flyway conservation initiative funded by GEF to date, and it is being successfully implemented (according to the independent MTE report). In addition:

- Most relevant MEAs supporting flyway conservation lie within the UNEP family (e.g., CMS and AEWA) and/or work closely with UNEP on international conservation issues (i.e., Ramsar Convention).
- The UNEP/WCMC is providing critical underlying IT/GIS elements of flyway-level initiatives, and it is also part of the UNEP family.
- Technical capacity, and multi-stakeholder partnerships have now been established with key flyway conservation partners, MEAs, UN agencies and international conservation NGOs active at a global level, as well as with national governments and local/regional NGOs.
- Important lessons were learned during design and implementation stages in GEF 4, and are being internalised by UNEP GEF and partners in view of future interventions.

The combination of the above elements provides a sound platform for the development of new flyway conservation initiatives by the UNEP GEF team and partners in view of GEF 5.

Consultation on possible new GEF initiatives is ongoing with a wide range of partners, some of which were invited to contribute to this paper. This consultation is already generating some initial concepts for new flyway conservation projects, at the regional and global level. These projects may include:

(a) Consolidating achievements in the same regions, and sharing experience and new flyway conservation tools with other regions. These new projects may focus on:

- Consolidating achievements in the African-Eurasian region (through the AEWA and the CMS Raptor MoU), and in regions outside AEWA such as Central and East Asia (through the Central Asian Flyway initiative and possibly the West/Central Asian Site Network for Siberian Cranes and other Waterbirds – under the CMS MoU on the Siberian Crane).
- Transferring approaches, know-how and new scientific and training tools on flyway conservation from the African-Eurasian and Siberian Crane Wetland Projects (and, at a later stage, the Migratory Soaring Birds project) into other regions including (a) the East Asian – Australasian and Pacific Region, (b) the Central Asian Region, (c) the Americas, and (d) the Antarctic Region.
- Developing a new regional (or multi-country) project in the transboundary region of NE China, SE Russia and NE Mongolia, as a follow-up to the Siberian Crane Wetland project, emphasizing the benefits of achieving flyway wetland conservation goals through emerging and shared themes such as climate change adaptation and securing the flow of environmental services to sustain wetland ecosystem functions and to support local development needs.
- Assisting members of the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) to implement collaborative regional projects that will contribute towards realizing the goals of the flyway partnership; diverse concepts already formulated include, for example, (1) support for a network of wetland sites engaged in sustaining livelihoods linked to waterbird conservation, (2) a similar network approach involving multiple sites along the flyway using the cranes as flags for environmental education programmes (these two concepts might well be linked), and (3) assessment of climate change risks for a set of sites along the flyway, with development of adaptation responses. See http://www.eaaflyway.net/documents/East-Asian-project-concepts.pdf for a compiled package of

15. The third: the “Migratory Soaring Birds” project is implemented through UNDP.

16. The interest for the new WOW flyway conservation tools within these other regions is already high. For example the WOW Critical Site Network Tool is being developed with an engine that would allow application in each of the other flyways mentioned.
EAAFP project concepts.

- Assisting international NGOs to nurture a portfolio of new flyway initiatives anchored to AEWA’s Strategic Plan and International Implementation Tasks (IIT).

(b) Developing new Global Initiatives under the umbrella of the CMS, with a possible focus on:

- Facilitating the gradual integration, sharing of experiences and tools, and harmonisation of approaches among all different regions and partners involved in flyway conservation, at a global scale, allowing for specific and individual adaptations to regional needs.
- Supporting the new CMS “Flyway Working Group” and feeding it with experience from ongoing successful flyways projects. The FWG will be an important forum to assist the process. It will scientifically underpin and help to rationalise and streamline the framework for all existing and planned flyway conservation agreements and initiatives worldwide.
- Enhancing awareness raising, training and education efforts to support flyway conservation as outlined in the CMS Flyways brochure – supporting the wider implementation of the BirdLife International Global Flyways Programme and continued delivery and application of Wetland International’s “Flyway Training Kits” (initiated through the UNEP/GEF African-Eurasian Flyways project).

- Expanding and consolidating the broad multi-stakeholder partnerships that were successfully developed prior to and during both flyways projects under review, and entailing several MEAs and International Partnerships (i.e., the EAAFP) teaming up with UN agencies, International NGOs as well as National Governments, creating an unusually broad and very effective constituency.

Linkages with other UNEP/GEF focal areas and themes:
Significant potential links exist or are emerging, with several other focal areas and themes of GEF and UNEP interventions. These themes include, but may not be limited to Ecosystem Services, UN-REDD, LULUCF, Climate Change and Adaptation:

- Sustaining ecosystem services during conditions of water scarcity and climate change in a regional or transboundary context, as a basis for increasing the resilience of local communities and wildlife, including migratory birds, to water stress and climate change impacts.

These initiatives would address the direct and indirect drivers that are causing the degradation of migratory bird populations, their habitats, and key ecosystem services, with a strong focus on resolving immediate and long term impacts of water scarcity through environmental flow provision and promoting more sustainable use of water and natural resources.

- The economic value of migratory birds (particularly waterbirds) in the framework of sustainable uses including regulated hunting.
- Assessment of hunting legislation and practices in Western/Central Asia and implementation of a regional education and awareness programme on hunting in the Central Asian Flyway.
- Improving global monitoring and analytical capacity on migratory birds’ seasonal movements, as indicators of climate change, as well as to improve our level of preparedness and active early warning systems for major outbreaks of diseases such as avian influenza (established links with FAO)
- Re-assessing identified networks of Critical Sites for migratory species in the light of predicted climate change impacts, and recommending how to strengthen these networks in the context of national climate change adaptation plans.

The drafting of this issue paper has been a highly participatory process, in which many people have been engaged. It has brought together some of the leading conservation agencies, experts and practitioners in the field of bird conservation to discuss experiences and lessons from ongoing flyway-themed initiatives currently being implemented by UNEP.

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ANNEX II: RELEVANT BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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