



The Edinburgh Declaration

An international conference on waterbirds, their conservation and sustainable use was held in Edinburgh, Scotland, from 3-8 April 2004, and was attended by 456 participants from 90 countries.

Conscious that waterbird flyways are biological systems of migration paths that directly link sites and ecosystems in different countries and continents;

Recalling that the conservation and wise-use of waterbirds is a shared responsibility of nations and peoples and a common concern of human-kind;

Recalling also the long history of international co-operation for waterbird conservation developed over a hundred years with treaties such as that concerned with migratory birds in 1916 between USA and UK (on behalf of Canada), and that over 40 years ago, the first European Meeting on Wildfowl Conservation held in St. Andrews, Scotland in 1963, started a process leading to the establishment of the Convention on wetlands especially as waterfowl habitat in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971;

Noting that major international conferences in Noordwijk aan Zee, The Netherlands (1966), Leningrad, USSR (1968), Ramsar, Iran (1971), Astrakhan, USSR (1989), St. Petersburg Beach, Florida, USA (1992), Kushiro, Japan and Strasbourg, France (1994), have further developed international technical exchanges on waterbird conservation;

Aware of the development of further inter-governmental co-operation through the establishment and implementation of further treaties, agreements, strategies and programmes; and of the development of considerable non-governmental national and international co-operation in waterbird conservation and monitoring;

Conscious that at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002, world leaders expressed their desire to achieve “*a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity*” by 2010, and that in February 2004 this target was further developed by the Seventh Conference of the Parties to the Biodiversity Convention, and **aware that** achieving this target will require significant investments and highly focused and co-ordinated conservation activity on all continents, and **recognising that** communication, education and public awareness and capacity building will play a key role in achieving this target;

Further conscious of the urgent need to strengthen international co-operation and partnerships between governments, inter-governmental and non-government organisations, local communities and the private sector;

Alarmed at the perilous state of many populations of waterbirds, in both terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and at the continued decline in quality and extent of the world’s wetlands;

Noting the conclusions and priorities for further action identified by the many technical workshops and presentations made at this conference, and recorded subsequently in this Declaration.

Welcoming the joint initiative of Wetlands International, and government authorities in the United Kingdom and The Netherlands, with the support also of Australia, Denmark, USA, Japan, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Belgium, Switzerland, UNEP/CMS, UNEP/AEWA, FACE, and CIC and with the input of many other organisations and individuals, in convening the conference *Waterbirds Around the World* in Edinburgh so as to review the current status of the world's waterbirds;

The Conference Participants, assembled together in Edinburgh —

Consider that although significant progress has been made to conserve waterbirds and their wetland habitats leading to some major successes, overall there remain important challenges, which, together with uncertainties about implications of future changes, requires further efforts and focused actions;

Reaffirm that, in the words of the Ramsar Convention, “*waterbirds, in their seasonal migrations may transcend frontiers and so should be regarded as an international resource*” and “*that the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna can be ensured by combining far-sighted national policies with co-ordinated international action*” and accordingly **urge that** efforts between countries to conserve waterbird populations and their wetland habitats are extended, not only for the values that waterbirds have in sustaining human populations, but also for their own sakes;

Consider that flyway conservation should combine species- and ecosystem-based approaches, internationally co-ordinated throughout migratory ranges;

Acknowledge that the conservation and sustainable use of waterbirds and wetland resources require co-ordinated action by public and private sectors, dependent local communities and other stakeholders;

Call in particular for urgent action to:

- Halt and reverse wetland loss and degradation;
- Complete national and international wetland inventories, and promote the conservation of wetlands of importance to waterbirds in the context of surrounding areas, especially through the participation of local communities;
- Extend and strengthen international networks of key sites for waterbirds along all flyways;
- Establish and extend formal agreements and other co-operation arrangements between countries to conserve species, where possible within the frameworks provided by the Conventions on Migratory Species, Biological Diversity and Wetlands;
- Fund and implement recovery plans for all globally threatened waterbird species;
- Halt and reverse recently revealed declines of long-distance migrant shorebirds through sustainable management by governments and others of human activities at sites of unique importance to them;
- Restore albatross and petrel populations to favourable conservation status through urgent and internationally co-ordinated conservation actions, especially through the framework provided by the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels;
- Substantially reduce pollution in the marine environment and establish sustainable harvesting of marine resources;

- Underpin future conservation decisions with high-quality scientific advice drawn from co-ordinated, and adequately funded, research and monitoring programmes notably the International Waterbird Census, and to this end, urge governments and other partners to work together collaboratively and supportively;
- Develop policy-relevant indicators of the status of the world's wetlands, especially in the context of the 2010 target, using waterbird and other data generated from robust and sustainable monitoring schemes;
- Invest in communication, education and public awareness activities as a key element of waterbird and wetlands conservation;
- Assess disease risk, and establish monitoring programmes in relation to migratory waterbird movements, the trade of wild birds, and implications for human health.

Urge that particular priority be given to capacity building for flyway conservation in countries and territories with limited institutions and resources, given that the wise-use of waterbirds and wetlands is important for sustainable development and poverty alleviation;

Strongly encourage countries to ratify and implement relevant conventions, agreements and treaties so as to encourage further international co-operation, and to make use of available resources including the Global Environment Facility in order to finance action required under this Declaration;

Consider that, with the long history of co-operative international assessments, waterbirds provide excellent indicators by which to evaluate progress towards achievement of the 2010 target established by world leaders in 2002, and to this end **Call on** the Conventions on Migratory Species, Biological Diversity and Wetlands, and other international agreements to work together and with other partners on such assessments, and in particular with Wetlands International to further develop the analytical content, of the triennial publication *Waterbird Population Estimates* and its use;

Stress the need for wide international dissemination of this Declaration and the technical outcomes of this Conference¹; and

Agree to meet again as a conference in ten years time to review progress.

Edinburgh
7 April 2004

¹ A full technical summary will be published during summer 2004 and will be available on the conference web-site – www.wetlands.org/GFC. Papers presented to the conference will be published in a proceedings volume in 2006.

In support of the recommendations above, the Conference concluded the following:

- For the Flyways of the Americas, collaboration between North, Central and South America and Caribbean nations is developing, based on conclusions of the conference of nations to consider the status of migratory birds held during the VIIIth Neotropical Congress in Chile, and in the recent completion of a Waterbird Conservation Plan for the Americas. Despite more than a century of conservation efforts in North America and emergence of a shared vision for biologically-based, landscape orientated partnerships, it is clear that international co-operation amongst Pan-American countries sharing migratory birds should increase.
- In African-Eurasian Flyways, the generally good knowledge of waterbirds is not being effectively transferred into necessary national and local actions. Nor have conservation efforts led to maintaining or restoring the health of many waterbird populations, including globally threatened species. There are urgent needs to integrate waterbird conservation as part of sustainable development, to the greater benefit of local communities and other stakeholders dependent on wetlands as well as benefiting biodiversity. The African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (UNEP/AEWA) provides a good basis to achieve this.
- Intra-African Flyways are extremely poorly known and would benefit from greater attention.
- Many of the waterbirds of the Central Asian Flyway appear to be declining, although information on status and trends is generally poor. In most countries there has been little previous investment in conservation and low involvement of local stakeholders in the sustainable management of wetlands. An international framework for the development of conservation initiatives for migratory waterbirds in Central Asia is urgently required to promote co-operative action. Better information is needed to identify priority conservation issues and responses.
- The waterbirds of Asian-Australasian Flyways are the most poorly known, and the greatest number of globally threatened waterbirds occur here. This flyway extends across the most densely populated part of the world, where there are extreme pressures not only on unprotected wetlands but also on protected sites. Effective protection of wetlands of major importance is a critical need, as in other regions of the world. There are huge, and crucial, challenges in ensuring effective wise-use of key sites, as well as ensuring that consumptive uses of waterbirds are sustainable.
- Conservation of pelagic waterbirds in the open oceans gives a range of unique challenges. The entry into force of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels is a most welcome development, and its full implementation is an urgent need. Addressing issues of seabird by-catch, especially by illegal and unregulated fisheries remains a critical need to reverse the poor conservation status of many species, as is the general need to achieve sustainable marine fisheries.
- Most of the world's known flyways originate in the Arctic. The recent development of international co-operation between arctic countries is welcome, as is the recognition of the crucial need to involve local communities and their traditional local knowledge in waterbird management. Austro-tropical Flyways also require research.
- Climate changes are already affecting waterbirds. The consequences of climate change for waterbirds will be multiple, and will greatly exacerbate current negative impacts such as habitat loss and degradation. There is a need for wide-scale planning, at landscape and

flyway scales, to reduce or mitigate the impacts on waterbird populations and their habitats. Research that explores a range of potential future scenarios will be required to underpin this planning and will need data from long-term monitoring and surveillance.

- The conservation status of non-migrant waterbird populations around the world in many cases is poorer than that of migrants, and these waterbirds generally have less focused international attention than migrants. Addressing conservation requirements of non-migrant waterbirds should also be given national and international priority.
- On a densely populated planet it is crucial that waterbird conservationists focus on their relationships with communities and governments as the means both of reversing the causes of poor conservation status, and of resolving conflicts with protected species. Adequately funded programmes of communication, education and public awareness need to be the core of all waterbird conservation initiatives.
- Science has identified the critical importance of a small number of key sites to long-distance migrant shorebirds and that human activities at some of these are responsible for recent dramatic declines in certain shorebird populations.
- Recent research has highlighted the genetic and demographic risks incurred by species that have small populations. These have implications for the design of species recovery programmes.
- The frequency and magnitude of disease losses among waterbirds (from emerging or re-emerging disease agents) have increased to the extent that they demand attention. These diseases not only affect waterbirds but have impacts on humans. Solutions require a multi-disciplinary approach.
- An integrated approach to the monitoring of waterbirds gives cost-effective identification of the reasons for waterbird population changes. There are good examples of the collection of demographic information and its integration with census data. Further such national and especially international schemes should be strongly encouraged and funded.
- Systematic analyses for atlases confirm the value of ringing studies in assessing the conservation status of breeding, wintering and stop-over sites within flyways. To this end, there should be integration of data from conventional ringing and colour-marking, telemetry, stable isotope analyses and genetic markers.