

WCC-2012-Res-028-EN

Conservation of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and its threatened waterbirds, with particular reference to the Yellow Sea

NOTING that the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (hereafter EAAF) supports more migratory waterbird species – and a higher proportion that are globally threatened – than any other flyway in the world especially the Yellow Sea region, which is of critical importance;

ALARMED that 24 waterbird species dependent on intertidal wetlands are listed as globally Threatened or Near Threatened on the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*, including the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*); the Endangered Red-crowned Crane (*Grus japonensis*) and the Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*); and the Vulnerable Swan Goose (*Anser cygnoides*), the White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*), the Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*) and Saunders's Gull (*Larus saundersi*);

CONCERNED that the situation is deteriorating rapidly with an additional nine species under review for classification as Threatened or Near Threatened, apparently linked to the unprecedentedly rapid rate of conversion of intertidal wetlands to other forms of land use in the EAAF (faster than the rate of tropical forest loss), thus generating an urgent need for specific research and cooperation for the restoration and management of these habitats;

NOTING that the rate of loss of intertidal wetlands is particularly severe around the Yellow Sea (as much as 50% in the last 30 years) and is continuing in key areas across the flyway;

FURTHER NOTING that less than 5% of intertidal areas of most EAAF countries are Ramsar sites or protected areas;

ACKNOWLEDGING the ongoing efforts of INGOs such as BirdLife International, the International Crane Foundation, the World Wide Fund for Nature, and Wetlands International to conserve these endangered birds and their habitats in the region;

RECALLING previous commitments to intertidal wetland conservation made by Ramsar Convention Contracting Parties in Resolutions VII.21 and VIII.4 and in Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan 2009–2015;

NOTING the commitment of the Republic of Korea at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention in 2008 (paragraph 22, Ramsar Resolution X.22) that “intertidal mudflats should be preserved and that no large-scale reclamation projects are now being approved in the Republic of Korea”;

RECOGNIZING the activities of the EAAF Partnership, an endorsed regional initiative within the framework of the Ramsar Convention, which provides an international framework for the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats;

AWARE that the decline in biodiversity along the EAAF is a clear indication of the decreasing availability of productive intertidal ecosystems and a warning of potential future ecological disasters, including irreversible impacts on fisheries, that could adversely affect human health and livelihoods, and undermine investments;

RECALLING that all countries along the EAAF are Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and have adopted the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020* and the Aichi Targets, of which Targets 5, 12 and 14 are particularly relevant;

DEEPLY CONCERNED that if urgent action is not taken to address the loss of intertidal wetlands, ability to meet the Aichi Targets will be seriously impaired; and

NOTING the independent report “IUCN situation analysis on East and Southeast Asian intertidal habitats, with particular reference to the Yellow Sea (including the Bohai Sea)” produced in August 2012 by the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) with the Asia Regional Office, as context for this motion;

The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Jeju, Republic of Korea, 6–15 September 2012:

1. REQUESTS the Director General, IUCN Commissions and Members to undertake an in-depth study that:
 - a. investigates the benefits of ecosystem services provided by intertidal wetlands, especially tidal flats and associated habitats, in East Asia with particular reference to the Yellow Sea, in relation to the benefits arising from the reclamation (land claim) or conversion of such habitats;
 - b. includes case studies focused on endangered birds and their habitats and develops habitat mapping as a tool and knowledge basis for selection, conservation and restoration of key sites for endangered birds;
 - c. provides a list of the key migratory waterbird sites and a network of experts to share experiences in the conservation and restoration of rice paddies, estuaries and intertidal wetlands as important habitats for endangered birds in the region; and
 - d. evaluates the status of endangered birds and their habitats and suggests prioritized sites requiring urgent conservation and restoration;
2. ENCOURAGES governments along the EAAF to recognize the international importance of their intertidal wetlands for biodiversity and ecosystem services, halting further approval of intertidal mudflat reclamation (land claim) at priority sites for biodiversity, irrespective of protection status, until a full assessment of the economics of ecological services and identification of biodiversity needs can be completed;
3. FURTHER ENCOURAGES governments along the EAAF, in view of the importance of cooperation between countries for achieving effective management, to develop international and national action plans by 2014 to secure the future of this fundamentally important resource, focusing on:
 - a. agreeing on the key sites for endangered birds that require urgent conservation and restoration, leading to the conservation, before 2020, of at least 10% of the intertidal zone as sustainably managed protected areas;
 - b. strengthening the Ramsar Convention (including encouraging ratification by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) to highlight the importance of key sites and improve funding and capacity to manage them;
 - c. strengthening protected area legislation and management, including increasing flexibility regarding the integration and control of human activities, to ensure achievement of conservation objectives;
 - d. ensuring that enhanced coastal zone planning results in stability of the biodiversity of the intertidal zone by embracing the principles of sustainable development and specifically by fully considering the ecological services and dependent biodiversity of tidal flats and associated habitats in integrated planning that incorporates appropriate Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact

Assessment processes, including appropriate site selection that considers alternatives, design to reduce impacts, compensation for unavoidable residual damage, and monitoring to assess mitigation effectiveness and trigger adaptive management;

- e. restoring impounded internationally important intertidal wetlands through increasing tidal exchange to such sites;
 - f. strengthening levels of awareness, transparency and public participation as regards the importance, values and benefits of tidal flats and associated habitats;
 - g. improving understanding of bird conservation needs via increased population monitoring and research on migratory bird patterns and ecological requirements; and
 - h. using the EAAF Partnership, a Ramsar Regional Initiative, as a mechanism for implementing a clear strategy to guide investments, programmes and activities for strengthening habitat and species protection along the EAAF; and
4. FURTHER REQUESTS the Director General and IUCN Commissions (to the extent possible within available resources) to:
- a. provide assistance to governments along the EAAF, and particularly those around the Yellow Sea, to find sustainable means of managing intertidal wetlands that meet the needs of economic development and biodiversity conservation, and to provide support to the proposed or existing national and international action plans as required;
 - b. provide assistance to IUCN Members to provide technical advice, contribute to awareness raising, capacity building and management action; and
 - c. report to the next IUCN World Conservation Congress on progress achieved.