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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

37<sup>th</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 5-8 December 2017

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**6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Group of Experts on the  
Conservation of Wild Birds**

21 June 2017 (Sliema, Malta)

**BACKGROUND NOTE  
ON THE MANDATE OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON  
THE CONSERVATION OF BIRDS**

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prepared by  
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**BACKGROUND NOTE**  
**ON THE MANDATE OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS**  
**ON THE CONSERVATION OF BIRDS**

## **1. ORIGINS**

In 1995, the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention included in its programme of activities a workshop to facilitate the discussion with the national authorities from countries concerned by 23 Action Plans on Globally Threatened Birds in Europe. These Action Plans had been prepared by BirdLife International and Wetlands International (and financed by the RSPB and the European Commission through a LIFE grant).

As a result of those negotiations and contacts, the Action Plans were amended and formally presented to the Standing Committee in January 1996. The Standing Committee adopted a Recommendation on those Action Plans, [Recommendation No. 48 \(1996\) concerning the conservation of European globally threatened birds](#).

In addition, the Standing Committee decided to create a Group of Experts on the Conservation of birds under the Bern Convention, whose main task is to review the progress in the implementation of Recommendation 48 (1996) and to make proposals to the Standing Committee on its terms of reference.

In 1997, in Izmir (Turkey), the Group of Experts on the Conservation of birds met for the first time and discussed a draft text for its terms of reference. Already at the time, the Group was largely meant to be used as a forum for discussion and collaboration between governments and governmental and non-governmental organisations concerned with bird conservation in Europe.

## **2. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON THE CONSERVATION OF BIRDS**

The terms of Reference of the Group, adopted at the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention in 1997, are as follows:

**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR**  
**THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON BIRD CONSERVATION**

- To review current problems of bird conservation in the Convention's area and to suggest appropriate action ;
- To advise the Standing Committee and Bureau on matters related to bird conservation, receiving papers and written consultation and responding accordingly ;
- In particular to monitor the implementation of Bird Action Plans in conjunction with the European Union ORNIS Committee, especially those covered by Recommendation No. 48 of the Standing Committee, by receiving and reviewing reports on their implementation and by informing the Standing Committee on the progress made and the points where urgent action is required. The Group may review results of monitoring activities into the status of globally threatened birds, suggest species that may require Action Plans and propose new monitoring activities. The Group may advise on proposals to the Standing Committee on possible amendment of the appendices and the need for special studies to be included in its working programme and present draft recommendations. Additionally, the Group may liaise with the ORNIS Committee, staff of the Bonn Convention Secretariat and its agreements and other expert groups on threatened species, (linking with them into the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy Theme 11 processes), disseminate information on threatened birds and propose other measures and activities which might be appropriate for the conservation of threatened birds ;
- The Secretariat of the Bern Convention will be assisted by BirdLife International [at its own cost] to liaise and secure follow-up actions between meetings of the Group.

### 3. COMPOSITION AND FUNCTIONING OF THE GROUP

From the outset, the Group was largely meant to be used as a forum for discussion and collaboration between governments and governmental and non-governmental organisations concerned with bird conservation in Europe. The Group meets every two years under the authority of the Standing Committee.

The membership of the Group included Contracting Parties to the Convention, observer States and appropriate governmental and non-governmental observers (these include other international organisations and Conventions, BirdLife International and its Partners, Wetlands International, WWF, European Habitat Forum, etc.).

NGOs are key partners of the Convention in some of its core activities. NGOs play a critical watchdog role in monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the ground, as well as providing very useful information on the follow-up of Recommendations previously adopted by the Standing Committee. To do so, they submit their own reports to the Standing Committee and its Bureau, as official meeting documents. In addition, they are at the origin of many case-files before the Convention. NGOs are admitted as observers to the annual meetings of the Standing Committee, the governing body of the Convention, as well as to meetings of Groups of Experts set up under the Convention.

Therefore, much like the some other Groups of Experts under the Convention, - on Large carnivores and on Plant conservation -, the Birds conservation Group is run by NGOs, together with the Secretariat. The rationale behind is the recognition of the Standing Committee that NGOs have a very valuable specialised knowledge in certain areas and that it is necessary to avoid proliferation of experts groups on similar issues in Europe thus contributing to a more efficient allocation of limited resources.

### 4. PAST ACHIEVEMENTS

Since the beginning of its work on the issue, the Standing Committee to the Convention adopted a number of Recommendations linked to the implementation of Species Action and Recovery Plans:

- Recommendations No. 48 (1996) on the conservation of European globally threatened birds;
- Recommendation No. 60 (1997) on the implementation of the actions plans for globally threatened birds in Europe;
- Recommendation No. 62 (1997) on the conservation of regionally threatened birds in the Macaronesian and Mediterranean regions;
- Recommendation No. 75 (1999) on the implementation of new action plans for globally threatened birds in Europe;
- Recommendation No. 88 (2001) on the implementation of five new Action Plans for globally threatened birds in Europe;
- Recommendation No. 92 (2002) on sixteen new Action Plans for most threatened birds in the Convention's area;
- Recommendation No. 103 (2003) on five new Action Plans for most threatened birds in the Convention's area;
- Recommendation No. 121 (2006) on the implementation of six new action plans for most threatened birds in the Convention's area;
- Recommendation No. 156 (2011) on the implementation of an Action Plan for the conservation of the White-tailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) along the Danube;

Following the revision and update of a high number of Species Recovery Plans in the period 2006 - 2013, the Standing Committee adopted:

- Recommendation No. 165 (2013) on the implementation of twenty-one new or revised action plans for most threatened birds in the Convention's area.

## 5. ILLEGAL KILLING OF BIRDS

The issue of illegal killing, trapping and trading of birds, particularly in Mediterranean Parties has been regularly on the Agenda of the meetings of the Standing Committee to the Bern convention in the past nearly thirty years. One of the very first Recommendations of the Convention [(No. 5 (1989))] concerned the prosecution of persons illegally catching, killing or trading in protected birds.

At its 30th meeting, in December 2010, the Standing Committee concluded that illegal killing of birds was still carried out, and in some Contracting Parties it was a growing phenomenon; it realised that the implementation of national legislation was often weak; that the issue also involved other transversal aspects like the transit of the killed and captured birds through third countries, the difficulty to identify the illegally killed species; the capture of endangered species; the need for countries to co-operate and to work with nature conservation NGOs; the need for proper enforcement with appropriate penalties at all levels.

A first "European Conference on illegal killing of birds" was held in Larnaka (Cyprus) and delivered the "Larnaca Declaration" and [Recommendation No. 155 \(2011\) on the illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds](#) adopted by the Standing Committee at its 31<sup>st</sup> meeting in 2011. The key message of the Larnaca conference was "Zero tolerance toward illegal killing of birds", and the event had the merit to set a pan-European vision to tackle the issue at stake.

The 2nd Conference on Illegal killing, trapping and trade of birds took place in Tunis on 29-30 May 2013 and was foreseen in the framework of the Bern convention/CMS Week on the Conservation of Birds. It achieved a step forward in addressing these matters, moving from the vision set in Larnaca to planning concrete actions with implementation plans with deadlines until 2020. In Tunis was adopted the "[Tunis Action Plan for the eradication of illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds, 2013-2020](#)", finally adopted by the Standing Committee at its 33rd session in 2013.

Since 2013, the Standing Committee adopted the following two recommendations, as part of the planned actions in the Tunis Action Plan:

- Recommendation No. 171 (2014) of the Standing Committee, adopted on 5 December 2014, on the setting-up of national policing/investigation priorities to tackle illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds.
- Recommendation N° 177 (2015) on the gravity factors and sentencing principles for the evaluation of offences against birds, and in particular the illegal killing, trapping and trade of wild birds;

## 6. EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE 6<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON THE CONSERVATION OF BIRDS

Under agenda item 6 of the 6th meeting of the Bern Convention Group of Experts on the Conservation of birds taking place in Sliema (Malta) on 21 June, a discussion is planned on the future mandate of the Group of Experts and its next meeting.

Parties and partner governmental and non-governmental organisations are invited to contribute to a discussion on the added value of the Bern Convention action on the issue of birds' conservation and to possibly revise the terms of reference of the Group of Experts and propose future activities for the Group.

The following three questions were sent in advance in order to facilitate the discussions and collectively plan the work of the Group for the years to come:

1. What are the top three issues where the Group of Experts could play a role in the future?
2. What is the added value of the Bern Convention on the issue of bird conservation?
3. How often the Group of Experts on the Conservation of Birds should meet?