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**Group of Experts on
Protected Areas and Ecological Networks**

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**Additional aspects of the evaluation
of the sufficiency of proposed Emerald sites for bird species**

*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

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1. Introduction

According to the document ‘Criteria for assessing the National Lists of proposed Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs) at biogeographical level’ (T-PVS/PA(2010)12), it was foreseen that additional guidelines would be developed for the evaluation of the sufficiency of site proposals for bird species. The evaluation of Emerald site proposals follows methods previously developed for the Natura 2000 network. However, due to historical reasons, birds have their own Birds Directive (1979) and have been treated differently from other species and habitats covered by the Habitats Directive (1992).

The purpose of this document is to describe main differences between the two evaluation approaches, the one used for bird species and the other used for other species and habitats. These differences should be taken into account during the identification of potential Emerald sites (Phase 1 of the Emerald constitution process) and in preparations for the bio-geographical seminars (Phase 2 of the Emerald constitution process).

2. Methodology and criteria

Preliminary assessment of sufficiency of bird representation in Emerald sites for the bio-geographical seminars will be done by comparing information recorded by Bern Convention Contracting Parties in the Standard Data Forms against various reference sources such as national and European Bird Atlases, Birds in Europe (2004) and the BirdLife International database on Important Bird Areas (IBAs).

This evaluation will be conducted as a combination of (1) a species by species approach, i.e. looking whether each species of Resolution 6 of the Bern Convention is sufficiently represented in the network, and (2) a site approach, i.e. looking whether all IBAs meeting certain numeric ornithological criteria for non-Resolution 6 migratory birds are covered by Emerald network.

Species by species evaluation will be done for all bird species listed in Resolution 6 (1998) at the country¹ level. This evaluation will cover all stages of life-cycle of the listed species, and where appropriate separate assessments will be done for e.g. breeding, staging and wintering periods. The following questions will be asked for each species:

- Is the species a subject for Emerald site designation in the respective Contracting Party given the nature of its occurrence and distribution (i.e. should it be included on the Reference List for that country?). If the answer is positive, the further questions will be raised.
- What proportion of national population is covered by the Emerald sites (ASCIs)?
- Is the geographical distribution range within respective country sufficiently covered?
- Do the proposed ASCIs meet the ecological requirements of the species?
- Are all IBAs hosting the concerned species covered by the proposed Emerald sites? Do boundaries of both designations significantly differ?

¹ For species other than birds, the evaluation is done at the level: feature/country/bio-geographical region. Biogeographical regions are not distinguished during the evaluation for birds.

3. Migratory bird species

The site approach is used to cover the need to protect areas of importance mainly for migratory species not listed in Resolution 6, but for which Emerald sites need to be designated². The definition of 'areas important for migratory species' is limited to those meeting the following internationally accepted criteria:

- The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, 20,000 or more waterbirds of one or more species or 10,000 or more pairs of seabirds for one or more species (IBA criterion A4iii³);
- The site is known or thought to hold, 1% or more of flyway population or other distinct population of a waterbird species or other congregatory species (IBA criteria B1i and B1iii);
- The site is a 'bottleneck site' hosting 5000 or more storks, 3000 or more raptors and cranes (IBA criterion B1iv).

In this exercise, all Important Bird Areas meeting the above criteria will be checked whether they are covered by the proposed Emerald sites. Each of the above three criteria will appear as a separate evaluation unit per country and discussed as a separate item during the national biogeographic Seminars (Phase II).

The use of IBA information assumes that in many countries this is the best dataset on sites that would likely qualify for the Emerald network from a bird protection perspective. However, if Bern Convention parties possess better alternative data, these will be also taken into account.

² According to point 1e of Recommendation No. 16 (1989) on the Areas of Special Conservation Interest (adopted by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention on 9 June 1989).

³ According to Heath, M.F. & Evans, M.I. 2000. Important Bird Areas in Europe. Priority sites for conservation. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International (BirdLife Conservation Series No. 8)