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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

35th meeting
Strasbourg, 1-4 December 2015

**8th meeting of the Group of Experts
on Amphibians and Reptiles**

Bern, Switzerland
1-2 July 2015

- MEETING REPORT -

*Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

The Group of Experts on Amphibians and Reptiles held its 8th meeting in the city of Bern, Switzerland, from 1 to 2 July 2015.

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the report of the meeting;
- Take note of the proposals of the Group for its future work and convene its meetings on a more regular basis;
- Examine and, if appropriate, adopt the draft Recommendation on the prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans chytrid fungus* and ensure its urgent implementation by Parties;
- Thank Swiss conservation authorities and the KARCH for their warm welcome and excellent organisation of the meeting.

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

The Chair of the Group of Experts on Amphibians and Reptiles, Mr Richard Podloucky, opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and thanking Swiss authorities for their hospitality.

In his introductory remarks, the Chair noted that the last meeting of the Group of Experts took place nine years ago and that, in the meantime, the conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles was only dealt by the Standing Committee either sporadically or in relation to complaints. Therefore Mr Podloucky welcomed the fact that the Group was reconvened this year and expressed the wish that the outcomes of this gathering will help ensuring more regular meetings of the Group in the future. He however regretted the absence of the countries that joined the Convention after 2006 as their contribution to the discussions would have been interesting.

He also stressed that this Group of Experts is the only of its kind in Europe, and emphasised on the need to keep this policy and discussion platform alive also in view of the worrying conservation status of European herpetofauna. Finally, he recalled that in 2012 the Societas Europaea Herpetologica (SEH) submitted to the Bern Convention an analysis of the implementation of the main Recommendations adopted by the Standing Committee, whose conclusions were not necessarily positive. He therefore invited the participants to hold a productive meeting.

Ms Sarah Pearson Perret, Head of Section, *Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN)*, welcomed the participants and thanked both the Secretariat of the Convention and the KARCH (Swiss Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Programme) for the work carried out in preparation of this meeting. She stressed that Switzerland attaches particular importance to herpetofauna, and regretted to note that – despite conservation efforts at the European level, many amphibian species are declining in populations and/or are threatened. She invited the Group to investigate further on the ways for overcoming current and new challenges, including the possible spread of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (BS) chytrid fungus. She recalled that Switzerland is at the origin of the request addressed to the Standing Committee for assessing this threat and wished that the Group is able to conclude its meeting with a strong and effective draft Recommendation on this topic.

Ms Ivana d'Alessandro, Secretary of the Bern Convention, thanked the Swiss authorities and the KARCH for the excellent cooperation in the organisation of this meeting and for the very warm hospitality. She emphasised on the strong relation between Switzerland and the Convention, starting from the city of Bern, where the Treaty was opened to signature 37 years ago.

Ms d'Alessandro expressed satisfaction for the relatively high number of representatives of Contracting Parties attending the meeting, as well as for the number of national reports submitted. Both data show the commitment of European States towards achieving better herpetofauna conservation.

Before concluding, Ms d'Alessandro gave an overview of the draft agenda, emphasising on two major items for which the Group is called to take important decisions: the draft Recommendation on the prevention and control of BS, and the Priorities for herpetofauna conservation in Europe.

Finally, the Chair invited the participants to introduce themselves, including their work and experience in the conservation of amphibians and reptiles.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Chair invited the participants to consider the draft agenda as introduced by the Secretariat.

The Agenda was adopted without amendments.

3. UPDATES ON AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES' WORK IN OTHER FORA

a. Outcomes of the 5th Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles

Mr Luis Cardona, President, of the [5th Mediterranean Conference on Sea Turtles](#), presented the conclusions of the Conference which took place in Dalaman, Turkey, in April 2015.

Mr Cardona described the main threats for the Mediterranean turtles and, most particularly, for the two species that nest there which are exposed at very high level of fishing and bycatch: the *Caretta caretta* and the *Chelonia mydas*. The format of this year's Conference has changed compared to the

past so to enable the scientists participating in the event to restrict the focus on both problems. The aim of the Conference was to set-up a research agenda to fill major gaps in knowledge, particularly about bycatch and demography. The need to adopt a regional approach to these problems was also evoked.

The main recommendations from the Conference relate to the nesting places in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is essential to build demographic models but additional research in female fidelity is critical to assess the number of clutches laid down annually.

There is also a need for a good system to monitor strandings. Turtles foraging in the Adriatic grow faster than in the Ionian so it is important to assess the age of maturity at these different foraging grounds. Moreover, research should also aim at identifying adults foraging grounds; for instance, while these are known in western Greece and Crete there is still a lack of good knowledge regarding Turkey and Lybia.

Another of the aspects to be investigated more in deep is the post-release survival rates. This is a typical example of issues that needs regional cooperation, possibly through a regional action plan. The research priorities identified at the Conference have been integrated in document [T-PVS/Inf \(2015\) 15](#).

Mr Tony Gent, representative of the SEH asked a question on the situation of nesting sites in conflict areas. The answer was that the political situation of these areas makes it impossible to carry out any research. However, Mr Cardona explained that Libya is important for the foraging grounds in Western and Central Mediterranean, which are areas that produce male turtles. If the Libyan population collapses, this is not going to affect the other populations.

The delegate of Italy informed about the Action Plan on marine turtles adopted by his country.

Mr Keith Corbett asked a question on the availability of figures related to the bycatch in wintering areas. Mr Cardona explained that this is a problem and presented the solutions that may be considered.

In conclusions, the Group of experts recommended that the Convention continues supporting the work of the International marine turtles' conferences and follows the development of the research work aimed at gathering the knowledge needed for the preparation of a regional Action Plan. The outcomes of the 5th Mediterranean Conference on marine turtles will be forwarded to the Standing Committee.

b. Update on SEH – C.C. most recent work

Mr Tony Gent, Chair, *Societas Europaea Herpetologica*, presented SEH structure and its [most recent work](#).

Since its creation, the SEH provided the focus for the conservation of herpetofauna in Europe. The NGO contributed to the preparation of action plans endorsed by the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention, and participated in some of the on-the-spot appraisals organised in the frame of the Convention's complaint system. In the most recent years, the SEH has slightly changed its focus, devoting more energy to local activities, with a good impact in the field. However and as a consequence, its capacity to influence work at the European level has decreased.

Still, the SEH is key in promoting knowledge exchange among European herpetologists and continues to provide expertise at the European policy level.

Mr Gent presented the structure of his organisation and gave an overview of the meetings held since 2006, emphasising on successful conservation actions for the European pond turtle, the golden salamander in Italy and the Meadow viper in Hungary and Romania. He then presented a monitoring scheme that is developing at country level, and the input that the SEH has given to the European Red List on amphibians and reptiles. In this context, the SEH raised an issue on the Red listing methods and is going to organize a workshop for addressing the situation of species that do not appear as threatened but that could be suddenly be at risk because of their fast decline.

Finally, Mr Gent presented the top priorities of his organisation for current and future work.

Following a question by the Secretariat Mr Gent explained that the SEH has provided expertise for the biogeographical process under the Natura 2000 network. The NGO would be interested in participating in the process related to the Emerald Network, provided that its capacity increases.

c. Herpetofauna Conservation and Transport Defragmentation in Europe

Mr Silviu Petrovan, Conservation Coordinator at the European Network for the Protection of Amphibians and Reptiles from Transport Systems (ENPARTS), presented the consequences of transport defragmentation for herpetofauna conservation.

Mr Petrovan explained why road impacts are particularly dangerous for amphibians, although the knowledge on their long term effects – including non-lethal ones - on these species is still not well known. Mr Petrovan presented some of the applicable mitigation measures implemented to reduce road mortality and maintain connectivity. However, he explained that these often suffer from badly designed or implemented solutions, aggravated by insufficient monitoring or inadequate targets. Moreover, the success of some of these monitoring programmes cannot be evaluated because the data so collected cannot be differentiated by species.

That is why, in 2012, some concerned organisations from several European countries decided to create ENPARTS as a network that brings together best scientific practice and advice on the protection of amphibians from transport systems.

Mr Petrovan presented the three main areas of concern for the Network:

- The network's expansion across the whole Europe;
- Its cost-effective functioning, both as a network and at the local level;
- The need to achieve effective mitigation measures.

Since its setting up, the ENPARTS has already been able to get at least five positive findings:

- Some governments have begun planning green corridors and wildlife crossing structures at a more realistic rate including experimental green bridges and well-constructed small animal underpasses;
- Defragmentation planning is underway in an increasing number of countries and ecological networks are being better conceived;
- Camera technology for monitoring animal passage through wildlife crossings is becoming better developed and more affordable, assisting with measurement of effectiveness of systems;
- Awareness of the lack of monitoring and maintenance of wildlife crossing structures in almost every country is being identified as an immediate problem and urgent challenge;
- Pointlessness of wildlife crossing structures without them being linked to protection of habitat linkages that are a part of a secure network of appropriate habitats on both sides of the transport corridor is better understood.

Still, there are a number of challenges that need to be addressed, namely:

- the chronic lack of populations' monitoring;
- the need to repair and ensure maintenance of crossing systems;
- the need to ensure that the materials used by the companies intervening on roads complies with few quality standards;
- the need to ensure that the ecological consultants hired as advisors have specialized knowledge in this field;
- ensure the adequacy of the safeguards during constructions.

Mr Petrovan further presented the example of Froglife in the United Kingdom and a couple of case-studies conducted by the NGO and related to the great crested newt. The results of these studies suggest that road mitigation design should consider the position of ponds and the distance to tunnels to facilitate adult passage. Moreover, success shall not be assessed before 5 years because of the high variables concerning capture rates and movements. Also, it is important to compare the mitigation success to the situation before the road construction. This should be done before and after the monitoring scheme is performed.

Future research will focus at testing probabilities of crossing.

The presentation led to an interesting discussion about the measures that can already be implemented in the planning phase prior to the construction of a road. Some of the participants noted that the practices in road construction vary from a country to another, and evoked the benefits of a possible harmonisation in this field.

The delegates of Estonia and Switzerland supported the idea of preparing a basic set of guidance on how to develop safer roads, avoiding defragmentation, and avoiding the implementation of incorrect mitigation measures.

4. REPORTS OF PARTIES ON NATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES ON THE CONSERVATION OF AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

The delegates of Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, France, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, the Slovak Republic, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and of Ukraine summarised their written reports, submitted in the frame of the monitoring of the relevant Standing Committee’s recommendations. These are contained in document [T-PVS \(2015\) 18](#). Those delegates who didn’t submit a written report made oral statements (summarised below). The delegate of Switzerland further presented more in details [the work carried out by the KARCH](#)

The delegate of the United Kingdom informed that his country will soon submit a written report. In the meantime, he said that amphibians and reptiles are considered also by the national biodiversity strategy which is looking at protected sites of particular importance for these species. The most used international framework for their protection in the United Kingdom is the Natura 2000 Network. The country counts with fifty-seven N2000 sites for crested newts and additional sites are being identified. Following a complaint to the European Union, the country has set up a task force for this species. Concerning the sand lizard its conservation status is not very positive but the conservation efforts for this species are improving.

The United Kingdom is particularly worried by the issue of the new diseases and is committed towards improving knowledge about these. Another area of concern is the monitoring of populations and the lack of updated data. In the past there has been quite inadequate monitoring but the situation is improving and the authorities are now well aware of this problem. Adequate funding for monitoring and surveillance is also needed: this is sufficient in Scotland but for instance Wales hasn’t implemented any monitoring project yet.

The delegate of Italy wished to bring to the attention of the Group the situation of two endemic species which are threatened in Italy. These are the *Bombina pachypus* and the *Podarcis raffoneae*.

The *Bombina pachypus* is among the most endangered amphibians in Italy and it is strongly affected by the *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (BD). Its populations are declining in many areas. The delegate emphasised on the need to tackle these new diseases through common regional strategies, putting particular attention on aquatic sites and, at the same time, he suggested that the Group of Experts invites Italy to carry out monitoring programmes of populations’ trends and BD infections at national level.

The *Podarcis raffoneae* has been long time regarded as a subspecies of *Podarcis waglerianus*, and elevated at full species status in 1994. It is an endemic lizard of the Aeolian Archipelago (Sicily, Southern Italy) and it is considered as Critically Endangered (CR) by the IUCN. The Aeolian wall lizard is the most endangered lizard species in Italy and possibly in Europe. It is severely threatened by hybridisation and competition with *P. siculus* (that was passively introduced on those islands and islets by humans). Population density is very variable among islets. Population studies are urgently needed, in particular monitoring using new robust and non-invasive approaches such as repeated counts (i.e. N-mixture models).

The Chair, speaking on a personal basis, provided some information on the situation of amphibians and reptiles in Germany. He evoked the Red List prepared in 2009, when more than 60% of reptiles and nearly 40% of amphibians were threatened. The next Red List should be published in a 10 year rhythm in 2020. As a basis a national database with data finds has been set up in recent years. The strict application of the EU Habitats Directive has been beneficial also to the enforcement of the

Bern Convention. In compliance with these instruments, the authorities issued some bans on construction projects to protect the species, namely those listed under Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive. At the federal level, there are some action plans for rare species (e.g. the Pond turtle, the Green lizard, the Dice snake, etc.). Implementation of these programmes, as well as their monitoring is carried out also independently from the Directive.

Mr Podloucky also explained that the Bern Convention plays a minor role in the conservation policies of the country because the Convention is enforced through the Habitats Directives and so are the Action Plans adopted by the Standing Committee; however, the Convention has been relevant in cases which have been the object of complaints, under the case-files system.

Finally, he briefly presented the special action “Amphibian/Reptile of the Year” by the German Herpetological Society (DGHT), where the population is made aware with various print media to one species. In a detailed booklet numerous measures and actions for different stakeholders are proposed to protect the species.

The delegate of Hungary explained that there are forty-four species of amphibians/reptiles in the country. A national monitoring system was launched in 1991 to monitoring 445 sites providing suitable habitats for amphibians and reptiles. Five years ago, the country launched a second monitoring system targeting species and concerning the whole national territory. Hungary also benefitted from some Life projects, targeting the meadow viper or designing reintroduction programmes.

5. TAKING THE PAST TO THE FUTURE – HOW CAN WE BEST ENCOURAGE ACTION ON PAST RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLANS?

Mr Keith Corbett analysed what – in his views – are the [limits of the system of Recommendations and Action Plans](#) which suffer from a lack of implementation by Parties. Mr Corbett said that most of the scientific work carried out by this Group of Experts in the past relied on inputs and information brought forward by the NGOs. Although the Standing Committee has acknowledged the interest of the proposed action plans, by endorsing them, Parties remained most of the time inactive with regards to the implementation of the proposed measures. Mr Corbett further regretted the lack of reporting even in cases where action has been taken, unless a complaint is submitted against a country in the frame of the complaint system. He said that as an ecologist he felt unable to propose any diplomatic solutions, but urged that these reporting and implementation problems be referred to the Bureau for their considerations as to acceptable remedial solutions.

On another level, Mr Corbett expressed criticism over the presumed lack of cooperation from the European Union for boosting implementation and engaging a real dialogue with NGOs.

In the discussion which followed the Secretariat regretted that the presentation didn't provide elements or proposals on how to best encourage implementation. The Secretary of the Convention noted that the Action Plans and the Recommendations where adopted by the Parties after careful examination, proving that they were considered as being useful tools. Implementation – or at least reporting on the implementation - has been poor and at the same time the general situation of herpetofauna in the area covered by the Convention has not improved. She thus invited the participants to discuss about the reasons behind the lack of implementation and the need (or not) to continue monitoring this.

The main conclusion was that conservation of herpetofauna is generally ensured trough wider and non-specific conservation schemes of projects. There is awareness about the need to act, but also a lack of funds, expertise and/or human resources.

6. CONTROL OF THE SMALL INDIAN MONGOOSE (*HERPESTES AUROPUNCTATUS*): MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RELEVANT RECOMMENDATION

Mr David Bird, from the British Herpetological Society, gave a very detailed presentation on the [small Indian mongoose](#) and its impact in the Balkans. He presented a review on the origin of the

species in Europe and how it affects the Balkan area, noting the lack of reporting from the targeted countries about measures to control the species, with the exception of Croatia.

Mr Bird explained how the species has been introduced in each of the areas where this pest is present, and how it affects endemic reptiles. There are methods of eradication which have been successfully used outside Europe. However, all of them present some challenges. For instance, live trapping is very labour intensive, kill traps as used in the United States may not be in conformity with European legal standards, and poison baits may affect other wildlife.

Mr Bird concluded his talk calling upon the relevant governments to undertake urgent measures against the small Indian mongoose because its impact on native reptiles is rapidly increasing.

The discussion that followed the presentation focused on the methods for the eradication of the species, with the use of poison baits being seriously questioned.

Mr Corbett confirmed that we did not need any new Recommendations nor alterations to the existing one; only a need for more **urgent** control actions by M.S.s where this predator on reptiles has already reached the shores of mainland Europe.

The Group decided to request the help of the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species to further address this issue with the relevant governments.

7. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND THREATS: DRAFT RECOMMENDATION ON THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF THE *BATRACHOCHYTRIUM SALAMANDRIVORANS* (BS) CHYTRID FUNGUS

a. State of knowledge and current threats

Mr Frank Pasmans presented the [outcomes of the most recent studies carried out on BS](#), stressing that chytridiomycosis may lead to the extinction of a high proportion of the species richness of a regional fauna, even a significant proportion of an entire class of vertebrates.

Mr Pasmans said that most European salamanders and newts revealed to be very vulnerable to this lethal skin disease in lab experiments. He then showed a graph about the species that will die from the fungus if infected, those which are tolerant and those which are vulnerable but can overcome infection.

Mr Pasmans also explained how BS arrived in Europe from Asia, most probably in 2010, namely through the trade in live animals. It is likely that it has then spread from captive animals to animals into the wild.

The symptoms of BS can be quite discrete and thus overlooked in the field. Mr Pasmans suggested that salamanders found dead in the wild without signs of predation or other obvious causes of death are suspected of the fungal disease. He then presented the histopathology and explained how a sure diagnosis can be made. Moreover, Mr Pasmans stressed that while it is possible to mitigate the impact of the disease on captive animals, there is still no knowledge about how to achieve the same results in the wild.

Besides, Mr Pasmans presented the current situation in the wild, with four sites where the outbreak is declared. In fact, the disease first appeared in the Netherlands but there are some known outbreaks also in Belgium, where one of the salamander's populations got nearly extinct (in South Belgium). Considering that four European countries are already officially infected (wild animals: the Netherlands and Belgium; captive animals: UK and Germany), Mr Pasmans presented the different scenarios concerning predictions for future. He also made a comparison with the spread of the *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (BD), which caused the extinction of a number of populations in several countries, and explained that – at least – the positive consequence of the spread of that disease is that both scientific knowledge regarding infectious amphibian diseases improved and the need for thorough monitoring of amphibian populations is acknowledged.

Mr Pasmans concluded his talk by calling for the urgent development of action plans at national and regional level to prevent the introduction of BS in free regions and to mitigate the impact of BS on amphibian populations in infected regions.

The discussion which followed the presentation focused mainly on the role of human beings (including scientists and researchers) as vectors for the spread of the disease and on how to respond to further outbreaks. The delegate of Belgium stressed that the disease is known from 3 places where a lot of outdoor activities take place and if human involuntary acts as a vector of the fungus, the disease may colonise new and distant sites very fast. . He called upon the urgent implementation of the recommended measures.

Ukraine informed about massive deaths of salamander occurred in 2001 without apparent explanation and asked if there were any records about BS in his country at that time.

The delegate of Switzerland suggested that some Parties may already have in place some specific legislation for dealing with urgent and exceptional issues that might be applied to the fight against BS for a rapid response. For instance, Switzerland has used this kind of legislation for stopping the issuing of permits for the trade of newts and salamander as a precautionary measure.

Mr Pasmans informed that the traders are very sensitive to the problem and suggested that cooperation with them for entry controls could be a first effective way forward. However, monitoring of populations is still vital, together with sufficient funding for research.

b. Draft Recommendation on the prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus

Ms Ivana d'Alessandro and Mr Benedikt Schmidt presented the draft Recommendation prepared on the basis of relevant studies and with inputs from some members of the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species.

The draft Recommendation was amended to include comments or concerns of Parties, namely on the need to apply stronger biosafety rules, including in research and captive breeding programmes, and to elaborate adequate protocols for monitoring the disease.

8. PRIORITIES FOR HERPETOFAUNAL CONSERVATION IN EUROPE

Mr Thomas Langton, Herpetofauna Consultants International Ltd., gave a short overview of the main conservation issues for amphibians and reptiles, and presented some of the possible [Priorities for the conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles in Europe](#). The latter are also detailed in deep in document [T-PVS/Inf \(2015\) 20](#).

The priorities discussed were the following:

1. Identify and monitoring taxonomic and mapping knowledge, and species and habitat status surveillance across the Convention's area;
2. Undertake a review of the range and scope of inputs required to contribute to holistic and wider countryside approaches to herpetofauna conservation;
3. Make specific proposals for contributions on herpetofauna to the Protected Areas and Ecological Networks Group of Experts;
4. Continue to monitor the implementation by Contracting Parties of the relevant Action Plans and Recommendations. Feasibility study for a new simple and streamlined method for recording progress and performance with potential online access;
5. Identification of Important Herpetofauna Areas (IHA);
6. Consider development of a revised system to assess rarity and herpetofauna threat levels on a biogeographical region basis for more consistent application across the Convention's and bordering areas;
7. Carry out introduced non-native disease controls;
8. Address the issue of introduced non-native carnivores, and conduct a review of the impact of non-native introduced predators on amphibians and reptiles, initially with mongoose species in southwest and southeast Europe and the potential for disruption of naïve wildlife communities across the Convention's area;

- 9 Strategic land use planning: document the way in which current systems implemented by the Parties are effective in respect of existing initiatives (PEEN/Green Infrastructure) and in relation to the needs of amphibians and reptiles with specific regards to freshwater and terrestrial habitats and the size scale and regional variation;
- 10 The future of Ecological mitigation, compensation and offsetting practices, using herpetofauna as a reference;
- 11 Undertake a specialist analysis of seas turtle conservation priorities.

Mr. Corbett strongly supported Mr Langton's proposal No.4 regarding M.S. implementation of Recommendations and Action Plans, and saw such actions as priorities

The participants welcomed the idea of setting a list of priorities for the coming years as a way to encourage continuation of work on Amphibians and Reptiles on a more regular basis. However, the discussion which followed the presentation of the proposed priorities focused once more on the most urgent issue, i.e. BD and BS control and the ability of countries to speedily respond to new similar threats. In this context Italy suggested that the Group could work at the preparation of shared (regional) protocol for the monitoring and screening of BS.

Encouraged by the Chair, the participants further considered the proposal regarding the identification of IHA. Some delegates of EU countries recognised that they don't have Natura 2000 sites designated specifically for herpetofauna. However, data on the presence of amphibians and reptiles are available in both the Natura 2000 and Emerald Network's databases. Thus the Group expressed the wish to work at the identification of IHA initially within the existing Natura 2000 and Emerald sites, but, where not sufficient, even outside these sites.

The Secretariat suggested that the Group could also address, in cooperation with the Group of Experts on IAS, the issue of the impact of introduced non-native species, including carnivores. For instance, in light of the little progress regarding the control of the Indian mongoose, maybe the Group of Experts on IAS could assist in devising alternative eradication tools.

The delegate of Italy offered his country's expertise for working on taxonomic issues.

9. DESIGNATION OF EMERALD SITES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILES: PRACTICES AND METHODOLOGY

Mr Fedir Kurtyak, PhD, Associate Professor at Uzhgorod National University of Ukraine, presented the methodology used for the [identification and designation of Emerald sites of importance for amphibians and reptiles](#).

He first gave an overview of the procedure for the designation of protected areas in Ukraine, stressing that the number of sites and areas of natural reserves increased by 145 units in the past two years, also thanks to the participation of Ukraine in the Emerald project. Moreover, Mr Kurtyak highlighted that, since the species listed under the Emerald Resolutions are more numerous than those included in the national Red Book (the correspondence between the two lists is approximately 40%), this is an incentive for justifying a broader protection and the designation of further sites.

He then detailed the methodology followed under the Emerald process, and emphasized on the results of the field studies conducted in the period 2001-2015, mainly in the Carpathian region of Ukraine. The data so collected have been complemented with material from zoological museums of Ukraine.

Mr Kurtyak also showed data on the population status and distribution maps for 11 species of amphibians and reptiles included in the Emerald database detailing, for each of them, the type of habitat, the trends and changes in populations, and the factors which determine decline. Some of these would need newly designated protected areas for their long-term conservation and –in this context- the Emerald Network constitution process is proving to be very useful.

10. CONSERVATION STATUS OF VULNERABLE VIPERS IN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AREA: WHAT NEEDS DOING NEXT?

Mr Göran Nilson, from the University of Gothenburg, gave a very detailed presentation on the conservation status of vulnerable vipers in the region covered by the Convention. More particularly, Mr Nilson provided information on the conservation status of threatened and vulnerable vipers (according to IUCN criteria), and emphasised on those which are listed in Appendix II of the Convention. He also focused on their distribution at biogeographical level, their geographical range, and on the main threats they face. Among the latter, Mr Nilson mentioned the collection of some very rare species for pet trade purposes.

In his presentation, Mr Nilson alerted on those vipers that would need more attention, as for instance the *Montivipera xantina* in Greece, or the *Vipera olguni*, occurring on the borders of Georgia and of which only fifty specimens are known.

During the discussion, Mr Langton asked what would be the top priorities for each of the species that have been presented as being at particular risk. Mr Nilson explained that an assessment of the needs to define and rank priorities has not been conducted yet.

The representative of Froglife said he received several alerts regarding species presumably put at risk by ski resorts in Azerbaijan, and hydropower and water dams' development in Armenia, Georgia and Turkey. The participants showed concern and noted the lack of more specific information on these countries. They therefore decided to invite the Bureau to request information to the concerned countries.

11. UPDATE ON THE CONSERVATION STATUS OF SPECIFIC SPECIES AND POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP ACTION:

a. The Aesculapian snake (*Elaphe longissima*)

Being in late with the schedule, the Chair asked the Parties to briefly take the floor for providing the most updated information on the species to be assessed under agenda item 11.

The delegate of Austria stressed that the Species Action Plan ([T-PVS/Inf \(2006\) 19](#)) on the conservation of *Zamenis longissimus* is focussed on isolated populations but it doesn't mention the isolated population in Tyrol. He informed about the measures implemented in the area for the conservation of the species and of its habitat and asked that the AP be applied to this population too.

The delegate of Italy informed on a recent revision of the taxonomy of the Italian population of Aesculapian snake (AS) and about the recognition of a new species, *Zamenis lineatus*, endemic of Southern (and partially Central) Italy. Road mortality, loss and fragmentation of suitable areas are considered the main threats for both species. However, the AS is a common species in most of Italy and its conservation status is of least concern. Therefore, apart from the need of collecting information on the new recognised species, there is no need to implement specific conservation measures.

The delegate of the Slovak Republic informed that the AS is widespread in warmer areas of the Carpathian bioregion, as well as in the Pannonian bioregion. However, local populations suffer from habitat degradation, loss of breeding or hibernation sites, sometimes also from human persecution or mortality on roads. The AP adopted under the Convention is not specifically implemented.

The delegate of Croatia reported on gaps in the distribution data of the species which are being addressed through Natura 2000 activities. The same applies to the *Lacerta agilis*. Both species are numerous and widespread, and no specific conservation actions, besides monitoring on national level, are planned in the near future.

The delegate of France said that the AS is not threatened in France and it is not a SCAP or ZNIEFF determining species, but it is relevant for the setting up of the Green and blue infrastructure in 4 regions. The species is protected under national legislation and this is considered to be sufficient for the moment. Therefore there is no implementation of the AP or of any other specific measures.

The delegate of Ukraine informed that his country is implementing some of the 11 urgent priority actions foreseen in the AP adopted by the Standing Committee, even though Ukraine is not specifically mentioned as addressee of the AP. He also said that traffic accidents are often reported in sites of high abundance.

During the discussion which followed, Mr Corbett raised the issue of habitat fragmentation within the key German area of the Rheingau where – in his views - management too often ignores the ecological and habitat needs of this snake. Creation of habitat corridors is particularly required. This is in contrast to its much smaller and better managed range in the southern habitats of the OdenWald in Baden-Wurttemberg.

The Chair answered that a specific Species Assistance Program for the species has been prepared by Hessen-Forst (FENA) and it is under implementation but in the context of the Bern Convention there has been no reporting on the results of its implementation, particularly when these actions have been good.

b. The Italian agile frog (*Rana latastei*)

The delegate of Italy said that in his country the populations of *Rana latastei* are fragmented and isolated although they are not of particular concern. Some reintroduction plans have been successfully implemented, including under Life projects. However, the BD may be a future threat: the disease is widespread along the country and it has been detected also in *Rana latastei*.

Croatia has designated seven Natura 2000 sites for the *Rana latastei*, covering almost the whole distribution area of the species. There are also some national monitoring protocols which have not yet been implemented due to lack of financial and human resources.

c. The Northern crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and the sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*)

Mr Keith Corbett introduced the item focusing on the situation of the [Northern crested newt](#). He said that there are many Natura 2000 sites where the species is present but it should be clarified how many of these were designated as such specifically for the Northern crested newt. He expressed the opinion that the species hasn't been taken as a serious target for conservation and that there is a general lack of regional coordinated strategy, which would have been put in place if the AP adopted by the Standing Committee would have been implemented by all relevant Parties. For both the Northern crested newt and the sand lizard, Mr Corbett invited the Parties to consult again document [T-PVS/Files \(2012\) 41](#) which provided a detailed overview of the main conservation issues.

The delegate of Norway informed that in his country there are three isolated populations of Northern crested newt, and the conservation needs of the species have been taken seriously into account. Norway has prepared an AP to secure and improve dispersal corridors and wintering areas. Three years ago a monitoring programme started and the collection of data has just finished. It is too early for assessing the long-term results but it would be good to continue the monitoring, pending the renewal of funding.

The delegate of Italy said that both species are considered of least concern in his country and that the Northern crested newt is widespread. The situation is less good at low altitude but along the Apennine the traditional irrigation system provides good reservoirs. There are also reservoirs and tanks used to conserve this species, which is a target species for many Life projects.

The delegate of Ukraine informed that the Northern crested newt is endangered but it is not listed in the red data book. The conservation status suffers from climate change and, unfortunately, for the moment there haven't been any specific researches or management plans.

The delegate of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” said that both species are taken into account in national parks where specific measures and management plans are implemented.

On the [sand lizard](#) Mr Corbett detailed the situation in countries where, in his views, there are problems of heathland management and lack of implementation of specific Action Plans. The situation is of particular concern in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. He also quoted some examples of success, for example in the United Kingdom, although he then stressed that the majority of progress with necessary habitat management had only been achieved via the independent input of one national NGO.

Regarding Germany the Chair recognised that there have been problems with heathland management in the past, particularly due to cutting, grazing and fire burning. These are still occurring but the situation has improved slightly with more consideration for the reptiles. Moreover, the implementation of the Habitats Directive (favourable conservation status) is producing some better results.

The delegate of England informed that his country will report to the Standing Committee and the report will also address the situation of the Sand lizard.

d. The Hermann tortoise

Mr Antoine Catard, Responsible of the *Pôle Var 83* at CEN PACA, France reminded that the [situation of the Hermann tortoise](#) in France had been object of a complaint and that – once the file closed – the Standing Committee requested periodical feedback on the state of progress.

In his presentation, Mr Catard informed on the conservation status of the species, as well as on the threats, actions, and steps for future. He reminded that the species is classified as “Near threatened” on the world Red List and as “Vulnerable” on the Red List for France. The current distribution in the country is in fact equivalent to 10% of historical area, and one of the three French regional populations has vanished (Eastern Pyrenees). The Provençal sub-populations are “Endangered” and the moderated decline for Corsican population seems to accelerate.

Besides, Mr Catard presented the peculiarities of the species and detailed the most important threats, among which habitat loss or fragmentation, forest fires, unfavourable agricultural and forestry practices, predation and IAS. He also said that although the Hermann tortoise is a robust animal, it is poorly adapted to rapid changes in its environment.

In order to ensure the proper conservation of the species, France has adopted a National Strategy and some regional conservation strategies (namely in Provence, Corsica, and the Roussillon - Eastern Pyrenees). The National Strategy has eight specific objectives translated in 93 actions of which 69 have been completed, 13 are underway and planned on the long term, 11 haven't been implemented.

The general assessment of these actions shows significant progress, both regarding the state of knowledge and the management of significant areas. However, agricultural developments are still unfavourable and there are difficulties in maintaining optimum conditions for the long-term. The level of positive results also differs from a Region to another.

Regarding the possible plans for future, Mr. Catard shared ideas on the development of a preserved site network, and on the possibility of carrying out reintroductions in and out of its range. Still, there are a series of threats that need to be address, namely the increased mechanisation of the rural environment, forest fires, and awareness raising.

The Chair thanked Mr Catard for the very clear and informative presentation. He stressed that the case of the Hermann tortoise in France is undoubtedly a good example of deployment of efforts which is paying with good results. He also noted that this is a long-term endeavor and asked Parties to keep in mind that the implementation of the recommended actions requires time and that success can only be measured on the long-term.

12. NEXT STEPS BEFORE THE STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

The Secretariat explained the procedure and deadlines ahead the Standing Committee meeting.

Besides, the participants discussed and agreed on the following list of priorities/actions for the future work of the Group of Experts:

1. Carry out monitoring and surveillance of herpetofauna across the Bern Convention area;
2. Continue the monitoring of implementation of relevant past recommendations and Action Plans, and call on the Standing Committee to encourage Parties with good experiences to share them through reporting;
3. Proceed to the identification and designation of Important Herpetofauna Areas (IHA) initially within the existing Natura 2000 and Emerald (including candidate) sites, but, where not sufficient, even outside these sites. In this respect, the Group calls on the Group of Experts on Protected Areas

and Ecological Networks to ensure that designation of Emerald sites takes herpetofauna into account and considers the contribution of herpetofauna to habitats conservation. (This task is to be implemented in cooperation with the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks);

4. Elaborate or endorse a set of basic principles common to all Parties to avoid or reduce the impact of transport defragmentation in Europe. These principles would mainly focus on how to develop safer roads, avoiding defragmentation, and avoiding the implementation of incorrect mitigation measures.

5. Review the impact of alien predators on amphibian and reptiles. (This task is to be implemented in cooperation and with the assistance of the Group of Experts on IAS);

6. Where possible and if the expertise is available within the Group of Experts, address pending taxonomic issues;

Moreover, the Group requests to the Standing Committee:

- To adopt and urgently implement the Draft Recommendation on the prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (BS) chytrid fungus. The Group of Experts offers its expertise for the preparation and setting-up of a shared protocol for monitoring the spread of BS disease in view of the implementation of common regional strategies;
- Invite Parties concerned by the spread of BD to urgently implement monitoring programmes of populations' trends and BD infections at national level.
- Ask Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro to address, as a matter of urgency, the actions recommended under Recommendation No.140 (2009) on the control of the small Indian mongoose (*Herpestes auropunctatus*) in Southeast Europe. The Group offers its expertise for conducting a regular monitoring of the implementation of this Recommendation at its meetings;
- Invite Azerbaijan to provide information in relation to the development of ski resorts, and Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey in relation to hydropower development and water dams that may have a negative impact on herpetofauna.
- Convene further meetings of the Group of Experts on Amphibians and Reptiles on a more regular basis;
- Convey the warm thanks of this Group to the Swiss authorities for the excellent hosting of the meeting.

13. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR

The Secretariat expressed its warm thanks to Mr Podloucky for the chairing of this and past meetings, with commitment, assertiveness and spirit of compromise. Moreover, the Group welcomed the nomination of Mr Benedikt Schmidt (Switzerland) to the position of Chair and proceeded to his election.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None were raised.

15. CLOSURE

The Chair thanked the participants and the speakers for the interesting discussions and presentations, emphasising on the capacity of this Group to address new challenges in a proactive way. He also congratulated the Group for the concrete and specific conclusions and recommendations that has been produced for the attention of the Standing Committee.

Mr Podloucky further thanked the Secretariat for the preparation of the meeting, as well as the Swiss authorities and the KARCH for the very warm and most professional hospitality.

Appendix 1



karch



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Bundesamt für Umwelt BAFU
Office fédéral de l'environnement OFEV
Ufficio federale dell'ambiente UFAM
Uffizi federal d'ambient UFAM



Bern Convention Group of Experts on the Conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles

Bern, Switzerland (1-2 July 2015)

AGENDA

DAY 1 - WEDNESDAY 1ST JULY 2015

09H30 – 18H00

1. Opening of the meeting

Mr Richard Podloucky, Chair of the Group of Experts

Ms Sarah PEARSON PERRET, Head of Section, Office fédéral de l'environnement, des forêts et du paysage (OFEV)

Ms Ivana d'Alessandro, Secretary of the Bern Convention

2. Adoption of the agenda

3. Updates on Amphibians and Reptiles' work in other fora

➤ **Outcomes of the 5th Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles**

Mr Luis Cardona, President, of the 5th Mediterranean Conference on Sea Turtles

➤ **Update on S.E.H. – C.C. most recent work**

Mr Tony Gent, Chair Conservation Committee, Societas Europaea Herpetologica

10H40 – 11H00 COFFEE BREAK

➤ **Herpetofauna Conservation and Transport Defragmentation in Europe**

Mr Silviu Petrovan Conservation Coordinator, European Network for the Protection of Amphibians and Reptiles from Transport Systems (ENPARTS)

Discussion

4. Reports of Parties on national activities and initiatives on the conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles

5. Taking the past to the future – how can we best encourage action on past recommendations and action plans?

Mr Keith Corbett, MBE

Discussion

12H30 – 14H00 LUNCH

14H00 – 17H30

6. Control of the small Indian mongoose (*Herpestes auropunctatus*): Monitoring of the implementation of the relevant Recommendation

Mr David Bird, British Herpetological Society

Discussion

7. Current challenges and threats: Draft Recommendation on the prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus

- **State of knowledge and current threats**

Prof Frank Pasmans

- **Draft Recommendation on the prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus**

Ms Ivana d'Alessandro, Mr Benedikt Schmidt

COFFEE BREAK

8. Priorities for herpetofaunal conservation in Europe

Mr Thomas Langton, Director, Herpetofauna Consultants International Ltd

Discussion

DAY 2 - THURSDAY 2ND JULY

9H30 – 12H30

9. Designation of Emerald sites for the conservation of Amphibian and Reptiles: practices and methodology

Prof. Fedir Kurtyak, PhD, Associate Professor at Uzhgorod National University, Ukraine

Discussion

10. Conservation status of vulnerable vipers in the Council of Europe area: what needs doing next?

Prof. Goran Nilson, University of Gothenburg

Discussion

11. Update on the conservation status of specific species and possible follow-up action:

- a. **The aesculapian snake (*Elaphe longissima*)**
- b. **The Italian agile frog (*Rana latastei*)**
- c. **The Northern crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and the sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*)**
Mr Keith Corbett
- d. **The Hermann tortoise**
Mr Antoine Catard, CEN PACA – Pôle Var, France

Discussion

12. Next steps before the Standing Committee meeting

13. Election of the Chair

14. Any other business

15. Closure

Appendix 2

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