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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

41st meeting
29 November - 3 December 2021

**GROUP OF EXPERTS ON THE CONSERVATION OF
AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES**

10th meeting (*online*)
Tuesday, 28th September 2021, 13.30 – 17.15 (CEST)

-MEETING REPORT-

*Document prepared by the Directorate of Democratic
Participation*

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- take note of the report of the 10th meeting of the Group of Experts on the Conservation of Amphibians and Reptiles which took place virtually on the 28th September 2021;
- take note of the information provided by Parties on the implementation of Recommendation No. 176 (2015) on the prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus;
- take note of the proposals by the Group for its future work.

1. Opening of the meeting and welcome of participants by the Chair, Mr Benedikt Schmidt.

The Chair, Mr Benedikt Schmidt (Switzerland), opened the meeting, welcomed the participants and wished the Group of Experts a fruitful meeting. The Chair reminded the Group that his term of office would end after the present meeting and anticipated that elections would be held under agenda point 8.

2. Adoption of the agenda.

After a *tour de table* of the participants, the meeting agenda was adopted with no amendments.

3. Reports by parties on national activities and initiatives on the conservation of amphibians and reptiles.

Representatives of eight Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention gave presentations on actions and initiatives implemented at national level on herpetofauna conservation.

The representative of **Croatia**, Ms Patricija Gambiroža, informed the participants of monitoring and research projects on herpetofauna, as well as management plans for specific protected areas and species, including invasive alien species. The slides of Ms Gambiroža's presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

The representative of **Czech Republic**, Ms Eliska Rolfova, gave an overview of the herpetofauna species present in the country and their conservation status and briefly described national efforts for monitoring and conserving these species. The slides of Ms Rolfova's presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

The representative of **Estonia**, Ms Merike Linnamägi, presented on the latest IUCN red list and Habitats EU Directive assessments for Estonia and focused on the comparison with previous assessments. Ms Linnamägi briefly informed the Group of current national conservation activities, gaps and future areas of focus. The slides of Ms Linnamägi's presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

The representative of **the Netherlands**, Ms Annemarieke Spitzen-van der Sluijs, informed the participants that the Netherlands will publish an updated national Red List on herpetofauna by the end of the year. Further, Ms Spitzen-van der Sluijs gave an overview of actions and initiatives for the conservation of herpetofauna, especially in regard to alien species and invasive alien species of union concern. Finally, Ms Spitzen-van der Sluijs anticipated additional remarks to the questionnaire on the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus (BSaI) discussed under agenda point 4.3. The notes of Ms Spitzen-van der Sluijs's presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

The representative of **Poland**, Mr Tomasz Łachnik, gave an overview of national efforts for monitoring and conserving herpetofauna species and informed meeting participants that all amphibians and reptiles are protected in Poland by species protection, not only in special areas. The notes of Mr Łachnik's presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

The Chair of the Group, representing **Switzerland**, informed the participants that a new red list for amphibians and reptiles in Switzerland was expected to be published in 2022. Mr Schmidt further presented on the results of the habitat conservation monitoring programme, in force since 2011. The slides of Mr Schmidt's presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

The representative of the **United Kingdom**, Mr Robert Raynor, presented on the results of IUCN Red List assessment of terrestrial amphibians and reptiles in the UK and informed participants of current activities

and recent publications on amphibians and reptiles and Bsal prevention. The notes of Mr. Raynor's presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

The representative of **Ukraine**, Mr Viktor Gasso, gave an overview of the number of protected areas in the country, the activities conducted at national level for the conservation of amphibians and reptiles and shared information concerning the new red list of amphibians and reptiles in Ukraine and the related threats to their survival. The slides of Mr. Gasso's presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

Following the Contracting Parties' presentations, Mr Tony Gent briefly introduced the Reptile & Amphibian Conservation Europe (RACE) network, highlighting its structure and main areas of work. The website is <https://race-europe.org/>.

Finally, Mr Balint Halpern informed the meeting participants that Conservation Committee of the Societas Europaea Herpetologica (SEH) has country representatives in a range of countries and access to data on herpetofauna conservation, which can be made available upon request.

4. Prevention and control of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus (Bsal)

4.1 Research on the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus

Mr Frank Pasmans, Professor at Ghent University, presented on the current state of research on Bsal. The meeting participants were informed of the geographical area and main species currently concerned by the spread of Bsal. Data on host susceptibility and information on field mortality and coinfections were also presented, together with the results of an EU-funded project which estimated the threat of Bsal and developed a mitigation action plan. The slides of Mr Pasmans' presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

4.2 Management of the *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* chytrid fungus

Mr Stefano Canessa, Researcher at the Institute of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Bern, presented key questions on Bsal management. The presentation focused on how to put research into action. The slides of Mr. Pasmans' presentation are accessible at this [link](#).

4.3 Analysis of parties' reports on the implementation of recommendation no. 176 (2015)

The Chair presented a brief analysis of the measures put in place at national level in response to Recommendation No. 176 (2015) of the Standing Committee. The analysis was based on the reports provided by twelve Contracting Parties in response to a questionnaire circulated earlier in the year. The key findings of the analysis were the following:

- Monitoring and research were considered to be adequate in those countries where the salamander chytrid fungus is present.
- The unexpected outbreak of Bsal in some countries showed that the risk of Bsal emergence is not negligible and should be taken seriously.

Based on the analysis and succeeding the discussion, the following recommendations were identified by the Group:

- Countries should have at least some passive monitoring and laboratories where diseased amphibians could be examined. It was recalled that the new EU animal health demanded monitoring.
- Countries should implement biosafety rules (prevention is better than cure).
- Countries should make sure that trade restrictions are maintained ("clean trade").

- Countries should ensure that amphibians in the trade can be tested. As anurans can also be carriers of Bsal, it may be necessary to treat them against Bsal prophylactically.
- Countries need to be prepared for outbreaks of Bsal. If mitigation action is implemented in a timely manner, then there were chances that Bsal could be locally eradicated. It was recalled that the new EU animal health law could be a good foundation for getting prepared.

5. The impact of out-of-river small hydropower plants on biodiversity in the Balkans

Ms Jelka Crnobrnja-Isailović, PhD at the Institute for Biological Research "Siniša Stanković" at the University of Belgrade, presented on the negative impacts of run-of-river small hydropower plants on biodiversity, with a particular view on amphibians and reptiles, in the Balkans. The slides of Ms Crnobrnja-Isailović's presentation are available at this [link](#).

6. Proposals to the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention: work ahead.

The Group recommended that the Bern Convention should continue its work on the conservation of amphibians and reptiles and identified the following areas of focus for the future work of the Group of Experts:

- follow-up on the Bsal recommendation;
- effects of small hydropower plants on amphibians, reptiles and freshwater biodiversity;
- collaboration on amphibian and reptile pathogens with the Group of Experts on Invasive Alien Species;
- follow-up on the existing action plans on amphibians and reptiles of the Bern Convention;
- write a new action plan for the natterjack toad, *Epidalea calamita*;
- explore which other anthropogenic stressors on amphibian populations (effects of deforestation, urbanization, climate change and pond loss) merit further dedicated work.

7. Next meeting of the Group of Experts on the conservation of amphibians and reptiles.

The Chair informed the Group of Experts that the next meeting will be held in 2023. He kindly invited the representatives of Contracting Parties to express their interest of hosting the next meeting in their country to the Secretariat.

8. Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair

The Group elected Ms Spitzen-van der Sluijs as the new Chair and Mr Schmidt as the new Vice-Chair of the Group of Experts.

9. Any other business.

No other business was raised.

10. Closure of the meeting.

The Chair thanked the members of the Group of Experts for the productive meeting, expressed his hope for an in-person meeting in 2023, and declared the meeting closed.

Appendix - List of Participants

Contracting Parties	
BELGIUM / BELGIQUE	<p>Mr Philippe GOFFART SPW – DEMNA – DNE</p> <p>Mr Thierry KINET NATAGORA</p>
CROATIA / CROATIE	<p>Ms Patricija GAMBIROŽA Head of the Department for Species, Habitats and Geodiversity Management Planning Institute for Environment and Nature Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development</p>
CZECH REPUBLIC / REPUBLIQUE TCHEQUE	<p>Ms Eliška ROLFOVÁ Unit of International Conventions Department of Species Protection and Implementation of International Commitments Ministry of the Environment</p>
ESTONIA / ESTONIE	<p>Ms Merike LINNAMÄGI Senior Officer Nature Conservation Department</p> <p>Ms Riinu RANNAP Nature Conservation Department</p>
FINLAND / FINLANDE	<p>Ms Ulla-Maija LIUKKO Ministry of the Environment</p>
GERMANY / ALLEMAGNE	<p>Mr Timm REINHARDT Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) Department of Wildlife Conservation</p> <p>Ms Kathleen PREIBLER Leipzig University Germany</p> <p>Mr Pilipp BÖHNING Trier University Germany</p>
NETHERLANDS / PAYS-BAS	<p>Ms Annemarieke SPITZEN-VAN DER SLUIJS Senior project manager and researcher Reptile, Amphibian & Fish Conservation Netherlands, RAVON</p>
POLAND / POLOGNE	<p>Mr Tomasz ŁACHNIK General Directorate for Environmental Protection Department of Nature Conservation</p>

SERBIA / SERBIE	Mr Marko DIVAC Representative from the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia
SPAIN / ESPAGNE	Mr Felipe MORCILLO ALONSO University Complutense of Madrid Department of Biodiversity, Ecology and Evolution
SWIZERLAND/ SUISSE	Mr Benedikt SCHMIDT (CHAIR) Amphibian department Info Fauna Karch & University of Zurich
TURKEY / TURQUIE	Mr Irfan UYSAL MARIAS (Marine Invasive Alien Species) GEF VI Project Coordinator (mariasturk.org) TERIAS (Terrestrial & Inland Waters Invasive Alien Species) EU IPA II Project Manager (teriasturk.org) Head of Marine Protected Areas Division The Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry General Directorate of Nature Conservation & National Parks
UKRAINE/ UKRAINE	Mr Viktor GASSO Leading Researcher, Research Institute of Biology, Oles Honchar Dnipro National University Ms Oksana NEKRASOVA PhD, Senior Researcher, Department of animal monitoring and conservation Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology NAS of Ukraine
UNITED KINGDOM/ ROYAUME-UNI	Mr James WILLIAMS Biodiversity Indicators Manager UK Scientific Councillor for the Convention on Migratory Species JNCC Mr Robert RAYNOR Mammal advisor Scottish Natural Heritage
Observers	
INFRA ECO NETWORK EUROPE (IENE)	Mr Tom LANGTON IENE Council of Europe Area representative
Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET)	Ms Vicky RAE Scientific Officer
Societas Europaea Herpetologica (SEH)	Mr Balint HALPERN Chair of the conservation committee

	Mr Tony GENT SEH member
Invited Speakers	
Ghent University	Ms An MARTEL Mr Frank PASMANS Professors Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Department of Pathology, Bacteriology and Poultry Diseases
Bern University	Mr Stefano CANESSA Researcher Institute of Ecology and Evolution University of Bern
University of Belgrade	Ms Jelka CRNOBRNJA ISAILOVIĆ PhD Institute for Biological Research "Siniša Stanković" University of Belgrade
Secretariat, Council of Europe	
	Ms Ursula STICKER Secretary of the Bern Convention
	Mr Marc HORY Project Manager
	Ms Nadia SAPORITO Junior Project Officer