

Safer passage for migratory birds of prey

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Strong international measures to protect over 70 species of migratory birds of prey and owls were agreed today in Abu Dhabi. The new measures will help to protect migratory raptors from threats such as habitat loss and degradation, persecution, accidental killing, and climate change.

Following a joint initiative by the governments of the United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been concluded that will coordinate the protection of migratory birds of prey and owls found in Europe, Africa and Asia.

“Each year millions of birds pass through the Middle East as they travel between Europe and Africa”, said Ibrahim Al-Khader, Head of BirdLife Middle East. “This important agreement will help ensure that migratory birds of prey and owls, including some of the world’s most charismatic and threatened species, have a safer passage during their epic annual journeys”.

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The MoU was signed at a meeting held in Abu Dhabi organised by the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi (EAD), under the United Nations Convention on Migratory Species. “BirdLife Partners in the Middle East will be supporting and promoting this important MoU”, commented Ibrahim.

Human activity has led to the decline in migratory bird of prey and owls, with 50% of the world’s species under threat. They face threats such as habitat loss and degradation, persecution, accidental killing, and climate change. The new agreement defines actions and cooperation needed to combat these key problems.

The new measures will ensure that signatories focus particular conservation efforts on critical ‘bottleneck’ sites – including those identified as Important Bird Areas by BirdLife - where large numbers of raptors concentrate while on migration from breeding grounds in the north to wintering ones in the south.

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Furthermore, signatory countries will investigate and attempt to solve problems likely to be caused by human activities, and assist the recovery and re-introduction of bird populations where they have declined.

“I am delighted that we have been able to reach an international agreement to protect some of the world’s most important birds of prey such as Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* and Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiaca*”, announced Huw Irranca-Davies, UK Government’s Minister for Wildlife. “These measures will protect

birds of prey along the whole route that they travel on their annual migration, which can cross the boundaries of many different countries with different laws to protect wildlife”.

“As many actions needed to conserve migratory birds of prey are common to other bird species, a new conservation agreement for birds of prey will have broader conservation implications”, commented Mr Abdalnasser Al Shamsi, Director of Biodiversity Management Sector - Terrestrial at the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi.

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