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Background paper

Memorandum to Senior Arctic Officials 08/09/2016

The Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative (AMBI)
For information/decision

OVERVIEW

AMBI’s goal is to improve the conservation status and secure the long-term sustainability of declining Arctic breeding migratory bird populations: [AMBI website](#). AMBI has produced a four-year work plan that identifies priority actions along four flyways: [AMBI Work Plan 2015-2019](#). AMBI will undergo a mid-term project evaluation in advance of the Arctic Council Ministerial.

ORGANISATION

AMBI is guided by a Steering Group comprised of Canada, Norway, USA, BirdLife International, UNEP Region of North America, the CAFF Secretariat and chaired by Russia. AMBI is comprised of four flyways and respective working groups (see Table 1). AMBI is coordinated by an overall coordinator (Canada) in cooperation with the CAFF Secretariat. The overall coordinator also coordinates the Americas and Circumpolar Flyway. A part-time East Asian-Australasian Flyway coordinator (Singapore national) has been established.

Table 1: AMBI organizations and representation

Americas Flyway	African-Eurasian Flyway	Circumpolar Flyway	East Asian-Australasian Flyway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada • US • Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network • UNEP RONA <p><i>Working to expand to several South American nations</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norway • BirdLife International • African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement • Germany: (Common Wadden Sea Secretariat/Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative) • Netherlands: (Ministry of Economic Affairs) • France (Centre of Ecology and Functional Evolution) • Spain: National Museum of Natural Sciences • UK: Joint Nature Conservation Committee • Guinea-Bissau: Institute of Biodiversity and Protected Areas • Mauritania: Parc National de Banc d’Arguin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAFF’s Circumpolar Seabird expert group*, • BirdLife International 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia • US • BirdLife International • East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership • China: China Bird Banding Centre, State Forestry Administration • Japan: Ministry of the Environment • Singapore: National Parks Board • Republic of Korea; National Institute of Ecology • Myanmar (TBD) • India: (TBD)

* Arctic Council countries and PPs will be the primary entities involved in seabird research and conservation actions. There are a few species (e.g. Arctic Tern) whose annual cycle takes them far from the Arctic. In those cases non-arctic countries will need to be involved. The existing CAFF Seabird expert group CBird is already well organized to undertake prioritization, knowledge assessment, and to identify conservation actions.

IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOPS

As part of the project implementation two technical workshops have been scheduled/held.

- The Netherlands hosted a three-day AMBI implementation workshop in April 2016. The meeting brought together steering group representatives and observer country representatives to discuss goals, timelines, funding, challenges and successes, with a particular focus on the implementation of the African-Eurasian and East-Asian Australasian flyways.
- An additional workshop will be held in January 2017 in Singapore alongside the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership meeting and will focus on issues of habitat and hunting in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership.

OBSERVER ENGAGEMENT

As a result of the Netherlands' implementation meeting organization and follow-up, the CAFF Chair and Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials have been in a series of communications via letters and invitations to their counter-parts in observer countries. As a result, the AMBI project has secured partnership and communications from the following observer countries:

- China: attended implementation meeting, nominated two representatives
- France: attended implementation meeting, nominated representative
- Germany: attended implementation meeting, nominated representative
- India: attended implementation meeting, nominated representative
- Japan: nominated representative
- South Korea: attended implementation meeting, nominated representative
- Netherlands: hosted implementation meeting, nominated representative
- Singapore: attended implementation meeting, nominated representative
- Spain: South Korea: attended implementation meeting, nominated representative
- UK: attended implementation meeting, nominated representative

In addition the following non-Arctic Council observer countries have been engaged:

- Guinea-Bissau
- Mauritania
- Myanmar
- Mexico

In addition, the Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials has also communicated with Greece regarding its support for Arctic migratory bird conservation. The Americas Flyway (AF) seeks additional communication from the SAO Chair to engage with Brazil, Suriname, Colombia, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, and Venezuela.

FUNDING

CAFF has applied under the Project Support Instrument for a contract to produce a crosswalk and series of smaller implementation plans for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and African-Eurasian Flyway, mimicking the successful path of the Americas Flyway (see section on implementation: Americas).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- One-page fact sheets developed

- [Americas](#)
- [Circumpolar](#)
- [African-Eurasian](#)
- [East Asian-Australasian](#) also available [in Korean](#)
- [Overview](#)
- [AMBI website](#), logo, social media activity

FLYWAY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATES

AMERICAS

Completed to date

- With support from the UNEP Regional Office of North America the crosswalk activity and implementation strategies are now completed.
- The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) funding award of \$460,000 CDN has been secured, and the project is now in the second year of activities.
- The AF committee is extending the invitation to include representatives from regions that have been deemed as key areas of interest. The representative from Mexico has responded positively, and we are waiting final approval on their participation. Letters of are being prepared for Brazil, Suriname, French Guiana (via France) and Columbia.

Activities of relevance to AMBI*

** these activities are not necessarily carried out by AMBI, but may be complementary to AMBI priorities and activities, and as such are highlighted here.*

- Canada funding “impacts of white goose habitat destruction on shorebirds in the east and central Canadian Arctic” project at Environment Canada, started in 2013 and is ongoing.
- Applications have been submitted to the Nunavut General Monitoring Plan and the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board for work incorporating traditional Inuit knowledge into white goose management plans.
- USA has submitted proposals to the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to support work in South America.
- AF committee currently working to find support for a stakeholder meeting focused on northern South America in the first quarter of 2017.
- The communities (CEC project) for joint conservation efforts along the flyways have been identified, and community meetings held to support local work.
- Teams are deploying tracking devices in several Arctic regions in 2016 to increase our knowledge of critical habitats for shorebirds.

Top needs

- Funding support for a regional stakeholder meeting with northern South America partners.

CIRCUMPOLAR

Completed to date

- A stakeholder meeting was held in Iqaluit, Nunavut that brought together regional stakeholders involved in the offshore fishery to explore and discuss seabird bycatch in the offshore fisheries in Canada.
- Two initial reports have been completed under AMBI (via the Marine Institute at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Bird Studies Canada) reviewing the state of seabird bycatch in northern waters and the state of fisheries in northern Canada, respectively. These are now complete and have been shared with stakeholders.
- A new three year work program for the bilateral environmental cooperation between Norway and Russia was adopted in December, partly based on AMBI objectives regarding seabirds.
- The circumpolar team has been included on the review panel for all Arctic fishery reviews under the Seafood Watch Program (eco-fishery ranking system).
- In collaboration with BirdLife International partners in 2016 some seabird bycatch assessment field work has now been completed in Iceland.

Activities of relevance to AMBI*

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- The circumpolar team is working with the department in charge of monitoring seabird bycatch in Canada (Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans) to collect seabird bycatch carcasses and improve data collection to improve the quality of data for future modelling exercises.
- Some progress has been made to better engage Greenland, the working group is in communication with Danish CBird members and have submitted a request for information and contacts regarding bycatch issues.
- The bycatch team is importantly getting good collaboration with Greenland partners on the ground in terms of the carcass collections (from Canadian boats) for assessing bycatch in the region.
- Work continuing via CBird's work plan, including addressing overharvest issues and conducting at-sea platform-based surveys and tracking (geo-locators, satellite tracking).
- CBird has submitted paper on murre movement and implications for harvest paper Field crews are currently in the field in Canada and Norway with a focus on increasing the tracking data that can be used to identify critical information on at-sea distribution.
- Data analysis and publication of work on at-sea distribution of thick-billed murre, with implications on bycatch issue and shipping lanes is being led by CBird.
- Norway is leading a lumpsucker gillnet bycatch assessment in the Pan-Arctic countries currently, expected to be complete by end of 2016.
- Engagement with International Snowy Owl working group is ongoing.

Top needs

- Seeking funding to complete seabird bycatch impact assessment in the Baffin Bay region.

EAST ASIAN-AUSTRALASIAN

Completed to date

- Implementation meeting, Texel, Netherlands, April 2016
- Organizing involvement and input into the EAAFP MOP, January 2017
- Successful observer country engagement including high level diplomatic letters specifically addressing key issues of importance

Activities of relevance to AMBI*

** these activities are not necessarily carried out by AMBI, but may be complementary to AMBI priorities and activities, and as such are highlighted here.*

- Planning team to work on next workshop to be held in Singapore, January 2017 (workshop supported by Singapore and Norway, and approved by Senior Arctic Officials)
- Canada funded \$60,000 CDN for “Caring for Coasts” global initiative on coastal wetland restoration through the CBD Secretariat. Some of this may assist the coastal work in this flyway, with the coordinator of the initiative proposed to be located at BirdLife in Singapore
- Korean Government (through IUCN) is funding a national meeting in 2015 and tri-national meeting in 2016 on Yellow Sea intertidal conservation
- China government, with support from US-based Paulson Institute, funded a China Coastal Wetland Blueprint project and established the China Coastal Wetland Conservation Network
- China government launched a Coastal Flyways program with WWF-China
- Norway has funded work in Myanmar on spoon-billed sandpiper
- Funding sought from U.S. (National Park Service, Alaska Region) to investigate use of NW Alaska by Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Red Knot (*roselaarii* subspecies)
- Efforts are underway by the U.S. to nominate an East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership network site in northern Alaska.
- Efforts are underway by U.S. and others to conduct a study focused on the four Beringian Dunlin subspecies that use the EAAF so as to highlight movement patterns along the flyway and determine carry over effects from wintering to breeding areas.

Top needs:

- Crosswalk exercise to be completed in the region to better align AMBI work with existing regional agreements, projects and activities to better identify partnerships, funding and implementation opportunities.
- Support from Arctic Council countries (and process to secure) diplomatic intervention to preserve Tiaozini mud flats in China

AFRICAN-EURASIAN

Completed to date

- Implementation meeting, Texel, Netherlands, April 2016
- Drafted Terms of Reference for an Intertidal World Heritage Site coordinator to sit in the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS) to advance the World Heritage Site nomination of Biljagós, Guinea Bissau and the trans boundary nomination of the Yellow Sea, building on the existing CWSS MoUs with Mauritania and South Korea
- Successful observer country engagement including Netherlands, who hosted the Texel implementation meeting and a series of high level diplomatic letters addressing specific issues of importance

Activities of relevance to AMBI*

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- An AEWA Implementation Review Process site-visit to Iceland was facilitated by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat in cooperation with the Bern Convention Secretariat and all relevant Islandic authorities and stakeholders (23.-27.5.2016) to assess the impact of Icelandic afforestation on migratory waterbirds. A final report outlining recommendations and next steps is expected to be finalized by November 2016.
- AMBI invited to have a seat on the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative Steering Group.
- Mauritania and the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat invited Guinea Bissau to join their (bilateral) Memorandum of Understanding
- A new three year working program for the bilateral environmental cooperation between Norway and Russia was adopted in December 2015, partly based on AMBI objectives regarding the Lesser White-fronted Goose and Arctic seabirds (Circumpolar Flyway).
- Satellite-tracking of Lesser White Fronted Geese (LWfG) in the Russian tundra and monitoring expeditions to locate LWfG wintering sites in Iran and Azerbaijan were successfully undertaken during 2015 under the frameworks of the bilateral cooperation mentioned above as well as the AEWA LWfG International Working Group with funding provided by both Norway and Finland.
- The 3rd Meeting of the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group (AEWA LWfG IWG) took place in Trondheim in April 2016 hosted by the Norwegian Environment Agency. Main AMBI-relevant outcomes include:
 - Adoption of new four-year work plan (2016-2019) incorporating the outstanding LWfG activities outlined in the AMBI AEF work plan;
 - Break-out group commenced action-planning process for Eastern main LWfG population. EAAFP and AEWA Secretariats discussing establishment of a LWfG Task Force under the EAAFP Anatidae Working Group to continue work on the Action Plan.
 - Nine priority sites/countries selected for urgent conservation action – including development of management plans - during the next inter-sessional period (2016-2019).
- The Norwegian Environment Agency provided additional financial support to Greece within the framework of the current EU LIFE+ project, thus ensuring the continuation of crucial activities to lessen the threat of illegal killing at key sites for another season (autumn/winter 2016-2017).

Top needs

- Funding to support an Intertidal World Heritage Site coordinator.
- Crosswalk exercise to be completed in the region to better align AMBI work with existing regional agreements, projects and activities to better identify partnerships, funding and implementation opportunities.
- Funding to support Lesser White-fronted Goose activities linked to diminishing the threat from illegal killing in key countries as identified in the AEWA LWfG IWG work plan.