

CMS COP14 Highlights: Monday, 12 February 2024

The fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP14) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) officially opened on Monday, with participants treated to welcoming remarks and powerful dance performances. The opening was preceded by a meeting of the Standing Committee and a High-Level Segment on Sunday.

The COP addressed organizational matters, noted several reports, and established the Committee of the Whole (CoW), which in turn established working groups and considered budgetary agenda items. In the evening, participants attended a Champion Night, followed by a reception hosted by the government of Uzbekistan.

Opening Ceremony

In the opening address, Abdulla Aripov, Prime Minister of Uzbekistan, welcomed participants to his country and pointed to the “urgent and coordinated” measures required to “preserve the harmony of human life with nature.” He highlighted Uzbekistan’s cooperative efforts with neighboring countries to create transboundary protected areas. Participants then watched a short, engaging video on migratory species conservation prepared by the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change, Uzbekistan.

Inger Andersen, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Environment Programme (UNEP), underlined that holding this COP in Central Asia is “a true milestone for multilateralism,” and called for strong multilateral solutions to prevent further threats to migratory species. Andersen said that all nations should engage in this effort, including those that have not yet ratified the Convention, because “migratory species are in trouble, and that puts humanity in trouble.”

Amy Fraenkel, CMS Executive Secretary, highlighted the Convention’s “unique and essential role” in addressing migratory wildlife issues that span countries around the globe, affecting and implicating a wide variety of species and cultures. She noted that the COP14 theme of “nature knows no borders” underscores the role of CMS: to strengthen international collaboration for the protection of species and their habitats across their full migratory ranges.

Noting that this was the first time a CEO of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) had attended a CMS COP, Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson, called for greater collaboration across sectors, conventions, and stakeholders, stressing that if nature has no borders, then neither should global conservation finance mechanisms. He welcomed further strategic collaboration between CMS and the GEF at the upcoming GEF-9.

Grethel Aguilar, Director General of the International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), highlighted the need

for collaborative and innovative solutions and partnerships that transcend national boundaries. She reiterated IUCN’s commitment to supporting CMS decisions and global conservation goals as outlined in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

Delegates were treated to a rousing cultural performance by an Uzbek dance group portraying the diversity of migratory species in Central Asia and the threats facing them.

Organizational Matters

Election of officers: Parties elected by acclamation Aziz Abdulkhakimov (Uzbekistan) as COP14 Chair; Colin Galbraith (United Kingdom) as CoW Chair; and Humbulani Mafumo (South Africa) as CoW Vice-Chair.

Adoption of the Agenda and Meeting Schedule: Chair Abdulkhakimov invited delegates to review the draft provisional agenda (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.3.1/Rev.3) and annotations (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.3.2), which the COP adopted.

Adoption of the Rules of Procedure: Chair Abdulkhakimov noted that there were no requests to amend the Rules of Procedure as adopted at COP13 (UNEP/CMS/COP Rules of Procedure).

Establishment of the Credentials Committee and other Sessional Committees: The COP elected Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Costa Rica, and the United Kingdom (UK) to the Credentials Committee, with a nomination forthcoming from Oceania.

Admission of Observers: The COP admitted international and national agencies and bodies that meet the criteria set out in Article VII, paragraph 9 of the Convention, to participate as observers at this meeting (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.6).

Reports

Outgoing COP Presidency: INDIA reported on activities undertaken by the COP Presidency since the adoption of the Gandhinagar Declaration at COP13, including initiatives focused on protecting big cats, dolphins, and migratory bird species, and on banning single-use plastics.

Reports and Recommendations of the Subsidiary Bodies of the Convention: Bivash Ranjan (India), Chair of the Standing Committee (SC), reported on SC activities since COP13, noting the “persistent concern” of unpaid contributions by parties and the draft Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024-2032 to be discussed at COP14.

Narelle Montgomery (Australia), Chair of the Scientific Council (ScC), reported on ScC activities since COP13. She highlighted the first State of the World’s Migratory Species report and another report on the effects of climate change on migratory wildlife, noting that “the effects are happening now.” She also described improvements planned for the next ScC sessional period, including more online meetings to advance priority topics.

Report of the Depositary and Host Country: Germany introduced the report of the depositary (UNEP/CMS/COP14/

Doc.9), noting that no further countries have acceded to the Convention since the last COP.

Statements: Parties: NEW ZEALAND highlighted progress made regionally over the intersessional period and noted the different implications of the COP14 theme for Pacific island states. SAUDI ARABIA noted his country's location at the crossroads of three continents and two important flyways, and reported national and regional programmes contributing to CMS implementation. The EU stressed the invaluable role of migratory species in determining global ecosystem health, and welcomed the launch of the first-ever report on the State of the World's Migratory Species. URUGUAY underlined the importance of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) and of using a range of collaborative modalities, including South-South cooperation, and called for ensuring adequate and predictable means of CMS implementation for parties. ZIMBABWE emphasized Africa's critical position as a hub for migratory species, and welcomed the opportunity to review progress and advance implementation at COP14.

CMS Agreements: The COP took note of reports from representatives of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.10.3.1), the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) and the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish, and North Seas (ASCOBANS) (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.10.3.2), as well as from the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA); the Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats (EUROBATS); and the Agreement on the Conservation of Gorillas and their Habitats (Gorilla Agreement).

IGOs and NGOs: BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL, on behalf of 21 NGOs, called on Parties to make ambitious decisions at COP14 to meet relevant commitments under the GBF. The ASEAN CENTER FOR BIODIVERSITY (ACB) shared its efforts to advance conservation in Southeast Asia, including the development of a regional biodiversity strategy and action plan. The INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION (IWC) outlined recent collaboration with CMS and its Agreements concerning bycatch, whale watching, ship strikes, and the role of cetaceans in ecosystems. The UN DIVISION FOR OCEAN AFFAIRS AND THE LAW OF THE SEA (UNDOALOS) emphasized the synergies between CMS and the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), noting that the upcoming Third World Ocean Assessment will consider marine migratory species and their habitats. The CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD) reiterated the relevance of GBF targets to CMS.

Report of the UN Environment Programme: UNEP summarized its report (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.11), highlighting collaborative efforts between CMS and other biodiversity conventions on the implementation of the GBF. Noting the growing portfolio of the Convention, she called on parties to provide timely contributions. The COP noted the report.

Report of the Secretariat and Implementation of the Programme of Work: The Secretariat introduced the report on the Programme of Work 2020-2023 (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.22), noting that nearly all high priority activities were delivered but others were not completed. She also outlined the procedure for the finalization of the 2024-2026 Programme of Work. The COP noted the report.

Opening of the Committee of the Whole

Committee of the Whole (CoW) Chair Galbraith opened the CoW and, with the CoW's agreement, established five working groups: on avian, aquatic, and terrestrial species; on the budget; and on institutional and cross-cutting issues.

Administrative and Budgetary Matters

Budget and Administration: Execution of CMS budget 2021-2023: The Secretariat introduced the document (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.13.1), noting that over half the Convention's parties have outstanding contributions totaling 1.4 million USD. She requested that parties provide their outstanding contributions.

The CoW noted the report.

Budget 2024-2026 and Programme of Work for the intersessional period between COP14 and COP15: The Secretariat introduced the document (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.13.2/Rev.1) and its three budgetary scenarios: one with zero nominal growth; one with zero real growth; and one with moderate growth. She stressed the necessity of a "modest increase" in budget to ensure proper staffing and information management systems.

BRAZIL underlined the difficulties experienced by developing parties in providing contributions and stated a preference for a zero nominal growth scenario.

The CoW referred the document to the budget working group.

Resource Mobilization: The Secretariat reported on the implementation of the CMS Programme of Work 2020-2023 (UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.13.3). She pointed to Annex 1, which proposes amendments to Resolution 10.25 (Rev. COP12), and highlighted intersessional activities that have successfully increased engagement with the GEF.

The UK supported the proposed amendments and suggested including mention of the GBF Fund as an additional resource.

The CoW referred the document to the budget working group.

In the Corridors

"Nature knows no borders." The phrase was on everybody's lips as the Samarkand sun lit up the Silk Road Congress Centre for this morning's opening plenary. Many delegates expressed their gratitude at having transcended their own national frontiers to meet in-person for the first time in four years. (Two separate incidents of accidental flag-toppling in plenary led some to worry that others may have interpreted the no-borders theme too literally.)

The warmth of the Uzbek welcome amplified the enthusiasm of convenors and delegates alike. Local staff, many of them students volunteering their time, were hopeful that the COP would shine a light on their country. Secretariat staff, meanwhile, were ecstatic about the global media headlines sparked by the newly-launched State of the World's Migratory Species report. "The world is truly watching," one delegate smiled. "We have to rise to the challenge."

Yet for others, the introduction of budget discussions in the afternoon pointed to the tough, practical conversations ahead. "CMS has just released a report saying one-fifth of its species are under threat of extinction," one senior delegate fumed, "yet over half the parties are in arrears! How can we ask the world for ambition when we can barely keep the lights on at the Secretariat?"

With a difficult week ahead of them and the world's eyes on their work, some delegates hoped that celebrating "Migratory Species Champions" in the evening—parties and stakeholders who have generously contributed to implementing the Convention—would build crucial momentum. "Whatever we decide on in Samarkand needs to reverse the free-fall in migratory species' health. Nature may not know borders," one mused, "but it also doesn't take excuses."