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# More migratory species get stronger protection under COP12 CMS

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In Photo: Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu and Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Executive Secretary Bradnee Chambers at last week's opening news conference of the 12th Conference of Parties Session of CMS held at the Philippine International Convention Center

Participants have started packing their bags—with enthusiastic and optimistic smiles for a job well done—ending an international wildlife conference with a high note for greater protection for more endangered migratory species and their habitats.

It was a grueling weeklong event which saw the momentum to save the world's migratory wildlife growing stronger, setting the pace for integration of wildlife and sustainable development with a historic number of amendments to species appendices having been approved on October 28 by environmental ministers and their representatives from 124 countries.

Hailed as a big success and victory for endangered migratory species, the 12th Conference of Parties Session on the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (COP 12 CMS) saw a record number of commitments for stronger protection for migratory species and their habitats.

The meeting saw 34 species proposals from 24 parties from Asia, Africa and Americas, Europe and Oceania added to the list of the CMS Appendices. These include the more well-known species like the lion, leopard, giraffe and chimpanzees, which global population are on the rapid decline.

The event saw more than 1,000 participants, including official delegates and observers from the Range States, and representatives from 24 nonmembers, actively taking part in the weeklong discussions.

## **Philippine breakthroughs**

The Philippines hosting the historic event—with the CMS meeting having been held for the first time in Asia—it was touted as the biggest gathering for the strengthening of protection measures for endangered migratory species and their habitats by the Range States.

It saw the approval of all-important resolutions the Philippines has put forward before the body, including the up-listing of the *butanding* (whale shark) under Appendix I, while maintaining its status under Appendix II.

Also approved were proposals for the listing of four other migratory species under Appendix II. These are the white-spotted wedgetfish, a shark species; and yellow bunting, black noddy and Christmas frigatebird, which are all bird species.

A total of 11 Philippine-drafted resolutions were approved. This includes the Manila Declaration on migratory species conservation vis-à-vis the sustainable development, the establishment of marine-protected networks in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region, establishment of a COP presidency, promoting intertidal and other coastal habitats for migratory species.

The Philippines, as an added bonus, was declared as a migratory-species champion for its effort to protect and conserve the whale shark, with scientific name *Rhincodon typus*.

## **Notable outcomes**

In its official statement, the CMS Secretariat noted some of the notable outcomes.

CMS Executive Secretary Bradnee Chambers described the international wildlife conference as “a game changer” for the convention, citing the intensive week of negotiations that have resulted in a stronger commitment by countries to step up their efforts to conserve migratory wildlife.

He noted that the governments had agreed to cooperate on reducing the negative impacts of marine debris, noise pollution, renewable energy and climate change on migratory species.

All fish proposals have been endorsed. This includes three species of shark and three species of ray, which will now receive greater protection with the whale shark on Appendix I and the angel shark being listed on both Appendix I and Appendix II. The dusky shark, the blue shark and the common guitarfish and the white-spotted wedgefish were listed on Appendix II.

All proposals on avian species have also been approved for addition to the CMS Appendices. On Appendix I are steppe eagle, four species of Asian vulture, five sub-Saharan vulture species, the lappet-faced vulture and the Christmas frigate bird.

A subspecies of the black noddy, the yellow bunting and the lesser and great grey shrike were listed on Appendix II

The giraffe was listed under Appendix II, hence, for the first time, it will receive protection under an international treaty because of the overall population decline across Africa.

The leopard and lion will also be listed on CMS Appendix II, which will pave the way for a joint initiative on protecting Africa's great carnivores, while the African Carnivores Initiative will become a focal point for the implementation of resolutions and decisions on lions, leopards, cheetahs and wild dogs, both under CMS and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites).

The chimpanzee is now listed on both Appendices of the CMS, as it faces a 50-percent drop in numbers over three generations of rapid habitat loss, especially in the western and eastern parts of its historic range.

In total, 12 mammals, 16 birds and six species of fish have been provided greater protection.

**Next stop, India**

Speaking during the closing news conference, Chambers was ecstatic to report the accomplishments and praised the secretariat and Philippines for the successful holding of COP 12 CMS.

In his opening statement, Chambers described the conference as a big success.

“What a week! Incredible! But it is worth it. Definitely worth it. This is the first time that we held this in Asia. And it won’t be the last. There is an offer that has now been confirmed for the hosting of the next meeting. COP 13 in 2020 will be held in India,” he said.

He said the target of making the COP 12 CMS the biggest international wildlife gathering was achieved.

“We have broken a lot of records. More parties attending, not only parties but nonparties. We have 24 nonparties here, a record number of [news] coverage; without the media, our work on the conservation of migratory species will not be known,” he said.

He said on the eve of the conference, a high-level panel and leadership breakfast were held.

Many ministers and vice ministers, he added, for the first time discussed the connection of migratory species and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals as proposed under the Philippine-drafted Manila Declaration.

“The lion, leopard, giraffe and chimpanzee—these are animals we can easily identify or identify with and their populations are facing sharp declines. We now hope that the Convention will work together to start to turn [this] around and bring a better conservation status for these species,” Chambers said.

He lauded the efforts of the Philippines for the conservation of the iconic *butanding* and the integration of their conservation to development, particularly ecotourism.

He noted that the Philippines has proposed resolution on sustainable ecotourism.

A new policy to ensure sustainable ecotourism includes guidelines promoting “boat based” and “swim with” policies.

Another species facing sharp population decline and needs protection, he said, is the vulture which provides a very important role in the wild.

Chambers added two nonparties have signified their intention to join the CMS and expressed hope that the number of signatories will continue to to 250 members across the globe in a couple of years.

### **The Philippines’s commitment**

Environment Undersecretary Roldofo A Garcia, representing Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu during the last day of the event, acknowledged the importance of the media to heighten the people’s awareness about protecting and conserving migratory species.

“The body was able to adopt all resolutions submitted by the Philippines for which we are very thankful and very glad,” he reported.

The turnout, he said, was “very heart-warming” being the most attended meeting of the CMS.

A total of 93 of 124 Range States were represented during the meeting. Besides the official delegates from the Range States, there are also leaders and representatives from 45 international non-governmental organizations and local NGOs in attendance.

He said the adoption of the country’s proposal for the listing of five species is a welcome development, not only in the Philippines but among the Range States, as well.

“The protection of these species is considered not only as a success but an insurance that the generations to come will get to enjoy the beauty and wonderful creations,” he added.

Garcia underscored the importance of protecting and conserving migratory species and their habitats. The convention, he said, highlighted the importance of migratory species

having direct and indirect impact on sustainable development because of their links to national and global economic activities, such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism, transportation, mining and trade.

Affirming the Philippines commitment to the CMS, also called the Bonn Convention, Garcia said the Philippines would continue to develop new and strengthen existing policies for the protection of migratory species and their habitats.

He added unity and action are critical to the Philippines's conservation effort. Quoting Cimatu's welcome remarks on October 22, Garcia said: "We encourage the media to disseminate the fact that species migration is something that has a direct impact on humanity through the services they provide. Their future is, indeed, our own future."

### **More work ahead**

Environment Undersecretary Analiza R. Teh, for Climate Change Service, lauded the CMS Secretariat for "a job well done."

"As chairman of CMS, the Philippines will continue to assist and ensure the resolutions and work programs will be implemented. The Philippines will also assist to bring on board other countries to the CMS," Teh said.

Environment Undersecretary for Field Operations Juan Miguel T. Cuna said the support provided by the organizers and the participants made the convention a success, as no glitzes were encountered along the way. He also noted that despite minor conflicts, all conflicts were eventually resolved and the entire process went smoothly.

Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources's Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) expressed elation that all the important resolutions and proposals were adopted.

"We are relieved now that it is over but it means more work to be done," she said.

“All our resolutions have been adopted but we need to follow them through. There was a decision on how the Philippines will support the process. Intercessionally, we promise to work on that,” she added.

Lim also noted the support the convention generated from the private sector, “who also took part and expressed willingness to support these efforts.”

### **The way forward**

Oysten Storkensen, chairman of the standing committee of CMS, underscored the need to protect not only the species listed in the Appendices of the CMS but their habitats.

He said governments must work together to ensure that the habitats or the range of the migratory species are protected.

“The convention has been focused on species. But now, at this conference, we see the focus, the second focus, on to how to conserve the habitats,” he said.

Antoinette Toss, founder of Planet Cora and a sustainable development advocate, said conserving species goes beyond simply conserving them, but more of a matter of respecting all life.

“Even with small things, like stopping the use of single-use practice, starting recycling, segregating, respecting all life we can make a big difference in this world,” she said.

Chambers said one way of moving forward for CMS is to ensure that countries comply with their commitment to the international treaty, by encouraging countries that are violating, and to comply and ensure the protection of the species.

To improve the conservation status of the species and their habitats, Chambers added there is a need to close the gap in legislation. He cited the importance of enacting laws, providing good financing and helping resource-poor countries to put in place adequate protection measures not only for the species but for their habitats.

“I think one of the biggest things that we are lacking is the gap in legislation. In order to implement the good things that are happening in the convention, the guidance that is coming from the convention needs to be implemented at the national level,” he added.

Chambers said the implementation of the treaty can be done through different ways, and one of which is through improving legislation and implementing the treaty.

“We took a step forward in this COP by passing a national legislation project that is linked to our compliance review mechanism. This is a positive step forward. We need more financing. Within the range, you may have a few strong countries, but we also have a few developing countries,” he said.

Moreover, he said there are issues that need improvements, such as renewable energy, lead ammunition and the need to involve more actors for the implementation of positive actions.

“We have been setting up task forces that include industry, government, experts, change-makers and policy-makers. By getting them together and arriving at a common understanding of the problem and a common understanding of the solution, then we can move forward,” Chambers added.

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