



INDIA: FIRST YEAR OF CMS COP PRESIDENCY







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**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS
(2020-2021)**

**Ministry of Environment, Forest and
Climate Change**

Government of India





Prelude

Keeping the true spirit of hospitality and warmth of India “AthithiDevo Bhava”, the 13th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species was hosted in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, in February 2020, which saw participation of representatives from several countries, besides Heads of several biodiversity related Inter-Governmental Organizations and other experts.

India was also able to successfully list Asian Elephant, Great Indian Bustard and Bengal Florican to the Appendix I of CMS for a cooperative action from the range countries of these species.

The ‘Gandhinagar Declaration’ that was adopted during the COP emphasized the need for “Connectivity” for better conservation of migratory species and their habitats.

For the first time, India has also been elected as the Chair of the CMS Standing Committee, which will see India steering ahead with proactive actions for conservation of migratory species and also added cooperation with several countries, both CMS Parties and Non-Parties.

India took over the Presidency of the CMS COP in February 2020 till the next CMS COP.

During the first year, inspite of the pandemic, India was able to take steps in furthering the cause of conservation of migratory species. A few important such actions taken since February 2020 is being highlighted here:

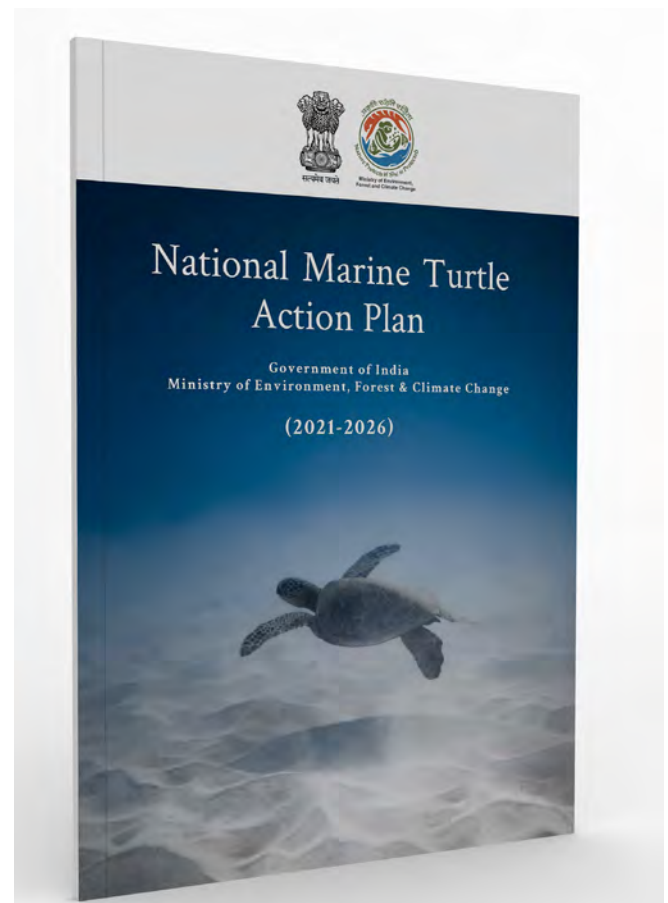
National Marine Turtle Action Plan (2021-2026)

India is blessed with its rich and varied biodiversity. In Indian mythology, 'Kurma' (Turtle) is considered as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and has, therefore, been conserved since the ages. Marine Turtles are considered to be flagship species in various marine habitats such as coral reefs, sea grass meadows, sandy beaches, etc.

Besides being home to one of the largest congregations of nesting of the Olive Ridley Turtles, five species of marine turtles are found in India. These species found in Indian waters have been listed in the Schedule-I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and thereby, accorded very high protection status. Considering the importance of conservation of marine turtles, the Ministry had included them as one of the 22 species for taking up focussed conservation programme under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme- Development of Wildlife Habitats.

India is also a signatory to the Indian Ocean South East Asian Marine Turtle MOU (IOSEA-Marine Turtle MOU) under the aegis of the CMS and has been playing an important role in conservation of marine turtles in the region. Considering the need for having a coordinated effort in marine turtle conservation, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has launched the 'National Marine Turtle Action Plan (2021-2026)' on 28th January 2021. **The Action Plan is in sync with India's commitment towards conservation of Marine Turtles as**

envisaged under the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU under the aegis of CMS and Resolution UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.7 (Rev. COP13). This Action Plan focuses on reducing threats, conserving critical habitat, exchanging scientific data, increasing public awareness and most importantly emphasizes on a participatory approach in conservation of marine turtles and its habitats. The Action Plan is set out for a period of five years, which will enable the stakeholders to perform their roles in a coordinated manner and take effective measures for the conservation of marine turtles.



Marine Megafauna Stranding Guidelines

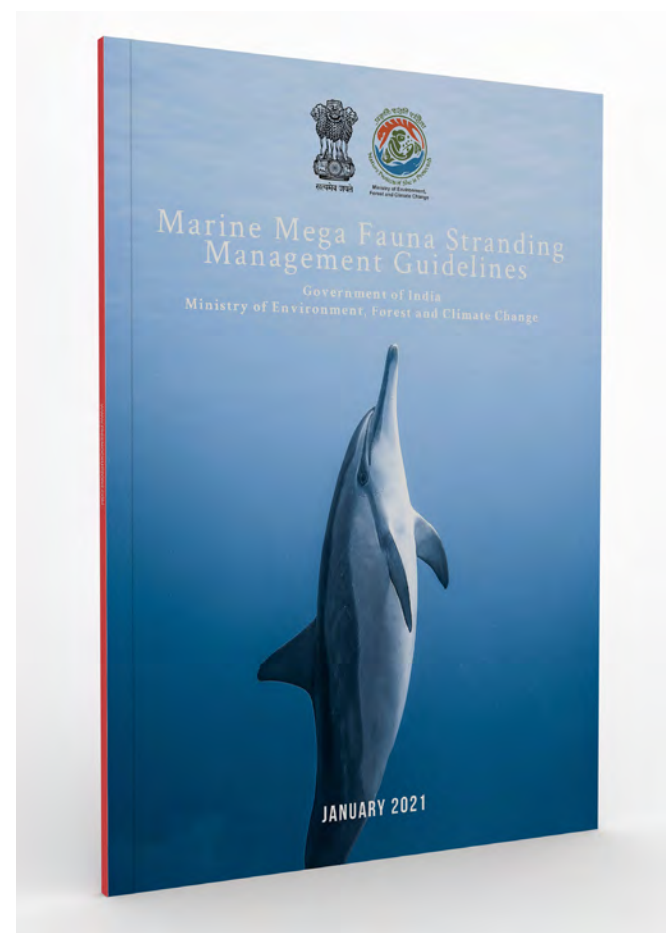
Marine ecosystem is considered to be one of the richest ecosystems on earth. India is home to one of the diverse and rich marine biodiversity. These also include Cetaceans like Whales and Dolphins; Dugongs, Marine Turtles, Sharks, Rays, etc. Government of India has been taking several measures for conservation of these species and their habitats.

India had witnessed incidences of stranding of marine megafauna on several occasions. These include stranding of Whales and Dolphins on the sea shore, as bycatch in fishing vessels etc. The reasons for such stranding have been varied. The implication of such stranding could include pollution, spread of diseases and altering the balance in the marine ecosystem.

Considering the need for having a guidance for handling and managing such stranding situations, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on 28th January 2021, released the guidelines for managing marine megafauna stranding, viz., 'The Marine Mega Fauna Stranding Management Guidelines' which is the first of its kind in the country. The Guidelines have taken into account the global best practices in management of marine mega fauna stranding. **This guideline is in sync with various decisions of CMS COP-13 pertaining to Cetacean conservation and reducing by-catch.**

The Guidelines provide for a participatory approach and recognises importance of the local communities in partnering for

conservation initiatives. The Guidelines aims to help the relevant stakeholders in better understanding and bringing much needed awareness on stranding of marine megafauna and also guide them in handling such stranding situations in an effective manner with the purpose of saving lives of these species.



Eco-Friendly Measures For Linear Infrastructure Projects

India has adopted a sustainable development path wherein development and conservation go hand-in hand. With a view to maintain healthy, living landscapes by reducing the conflicts associated with the linear developments, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had launched the “Eco-Friendly Measures to Mitigate Impacts of Linear Infrastructure on Wildlife”.

The purpose of these guidelines were to help in better designing of linear infrastructure in the country, that would not only help the wildlife but also be a step ahead towards Green Development. Creation of animal passages has been considered a vital part of construction of linear infrastructure like roads, railway lines, canals, etc., especially those passing through high biodiversity areas. Such animal passages facilitate the easy movement of wild animals whilst smooth movement of traffic. These guidelines have now been effectively put to practice in the country's development sector.

The implementation of the “Eco-Friendly Measures to Mitigate Impacts of Linear Infrastructure on Wildlife” would also help in mitigation of negative impact to migratory species and is linked with the CMS COP 13 Decision 13.130 as well as action for implementation of UNEP/CMS/Resolution12.26 (Rev. COP13) regarding “Improving ways of addressing connectivity in the conservation of migratory species”. The implementation of these measures on world's longest and India's first dedicated underpass for wildlife on NH7/44 which passes through Kanha- Pench Corridor has

resulted in 468 captures of 15 species during the 90 days of study by Wildlife Institute of India for monitoring of animal movement, including the Tiger. Similarly, a proposal for construction of a tunnel under the Mukundra Tiger Reserve, for 8 laning of National Highway also provides a good example in creating workable solution for taking tiger conservation alongside development. This proposal provides an illustration of maintenance of ‘connectivity’ for wildlife as well as vehicular movement.

Likewise, in the case of the ‘Delhi-Saharanpur-Dehradun Economic Corridor’, which aims to reduce the travel time between Delhi and Dehradun from existing 6.5 hours to 2.5 hours, also has stretches for underpasses/ over bridges for enabling wildlife crossings. In this, out of the 20 kms stretch passing through Reserve Forest areas, 12 kms is an elevated wildlife corridor. These examples reiterate the co-existence of humans and wildlife through proper planning and management of developmental projects.



Project Dolphin: Announced by Hon'ble Prime Minister

In his address from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the occasion of 74th Independence Day celebrations on 15th August 2020, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India announced a new National programme 'Project Dolphin' aimed to bring more focussed conservation of Dolphins (both riverine and marine).

The Project Dolphin aims to address existing conservation concerns for the species and also to empower the stakeholders to participate in conservation of dolphins. This includes a multi-sectoral approach involving forest department, fisheries department, fishermen and other stakeholders, through science based conservation. The river and marine ecosystem is the lifeline for the most marginal people in the country, apart from several threatened and endangered fauna. The Project Dolphin would also encourage the Dolphin Tourism in the country, which would generate income for several people living in the vicinity of Dolphins habitats.

The 13th CMS COP had recommended the proposal of India for taking up Concerted Action for Gangetic River Dolphins and Irrawaddy Dolphins. The 'Project Dolphin' would pave the way for taking up concerted action for these two species as well.



Asian Elephant Conservation

Elephant migrate across the landscapes and often cross international boundaries, and at times poses management challenges in protection including truncated movement due to resistance. An example is the migration of elephants between India and Bangladesh.

For conservation of Elephants, including their safe natural migration across international borders, as well as to mitigate Human-Elephant Conflicts, India initiated a series of dialogues with the Government of Bangladesh on trans-boundary conservation of elephants which resulted in drafting a Protocol on Trans-boundary Elephant Conservation between Republic of Bangladesh and Republic of India. The Protocol was signed by both the countries on 17th December, 2020.

The CMS COP -13 had recommended for listing Asian Elephant in Appendix I of CMS along with taking up Concerted Action for their conservation. The initiative of Government of India to sign an MOU with Government of Bangladesh is a step towards taking forward the concerted action on Asian Elephants.

As per this protocol, movement of elephants across borders, during the migration season, will be facilitated by both the partner countries. The protocol also enables both the countries to ensure safety for both animals and humans through advance warning systems thereby ameliorating the human elephant conflict situation.



Memorandum of Understanding With Myanmar on Transboundary Cooperation in Conservation

Control of illegal trade in wildlife and its part and products is a priority for Government of India and in this direction, strengthening cooperation between other countries has been taken up.

The Government of India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Myanmar for cooperation on combating of timber trafficking and conservation of tigers and other wildlife.

The MoU also aims to jointly intensify the efforts for combating wildlife and timber trafficking which is threatening the habitats of globally endangered species, particularly tigers and elephants etc, as well as

ensuring the continued survival of other wildlife species.

This initiative is a step forward for taking up the Resolution implementation of UNEP/CMS/ Resolution12.26 (Rev.COP13) regarding “Improving ways of addressing connectivity in the conservation of migratory species”.



Conservation of Great Indian Bustard & Associated Species

The Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) is a critically endangered bird and is a good indicator of grassland ecosystem. Conservation of this species helps in protecting grasslands which supports millions of pastoralists and agriculture practicing communities who breed some livestock breeds. In addition, conservation efforts also assist in well managed grasslands that, in turn, support carbon sequestration and reduce the negative impacts of Climate Change.

The Mascot for the CMS COP 13 was christened as "GIBI The Great" giving wider publicity for conservation of Great Indian Bustard. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has taken up an initiative on conservation breeding of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in collaboration with Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra Forest Departments and with the technical support of Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun.

The Government of India had sanctioned an additional financial support of 4.628 Million USD for the duration of five years(2016-2021) for the dedicated programme for GIB titled 'Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard-an integrated approach'. Over the last one-year critical power lines stretches have been identified to mitigate the issues of collision related mortalities of birds including the GIBs and other migratory birds.

Under the programme 'Habitat Improvement and Conservation Breeding of Great Indian Bustard-an integrated approach', eggs of Great Indian Bustard

were collected from the wild and artificially incubated and hatched at the world's first ever Conservation Breeding Centre established for artificial breeding of Great Indian Bustard at Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.

Seven (07) eggs of GIB were collected and artificially incubated and hatched during March- October, 2020. A total of 16 Great Indian Bustard chicks have been hatched in the breeding facility from eggs collected from wild till date. The birds from the breeding centre would be released into the wild after the successful breeding of more birds in the centre.

Four Great Indian Bustard female birds were tagged in Desert National Park in Rajasthan between March and July 2020.

The Lesser Florican (*Sypheotides indica*), is largely seen during the monsoon season in north-western India, where it breeds. It is amongst the smallest bustards of the world. Its numbers have declined during the last few decades due to various factors. As part of the focused conservation of the species, a conservation breeding facility for Lesser Florican has been setup at Bijainagar near Ajmer in Rajasthan. Two Lesser Florican chicks were artificially incubated and hatched at the facility during September 2020 from the eggs collected from agriculture fields in Ajmer District and are healthy. The 50 day old chicks are being hand reared at the facility and the scientific husbandry approach is being developed with these initial stock by a team of specially trained technicians.

Two Lesser Florican male birds were

tagged near Ajmer during August 2020. The tags fitted on the bird has been providing information about its movement patterns and used locations. Habitat assessment of the areas used by the tagged birds are being carried out.

The tagged birds are providing information on movement patterns and ecological needs that are being used to refine conservation strategies and mitigate threats.

The actions initiated by Government of India towards conservation of Great Indian Bustard illustrate the commitment for implementation of its commitment for taking forward the Concerted Action for Great Indian Bustard, as the CMS COP-13 had recommended India's proposal for listing GIB in Appendix I along with its concerted Actions.



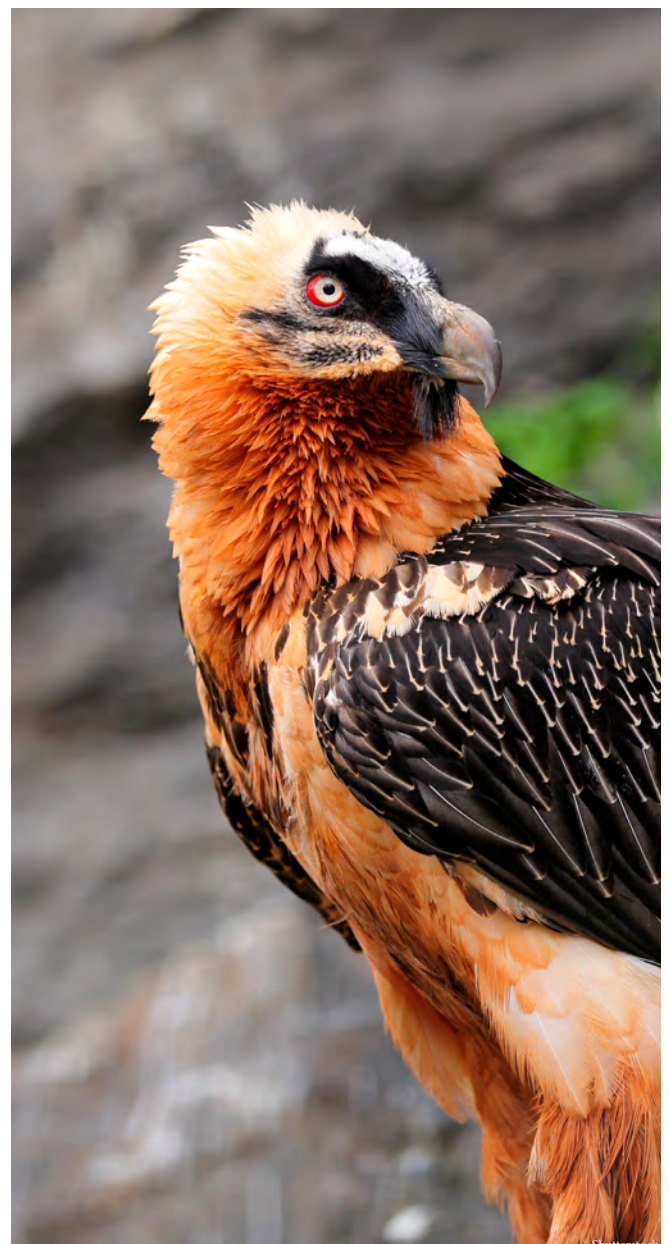
Conservation Of Vultures

Vultures are birds of prey and best known social scavengers. Healthy population of vultures is an indicator of a healthy ecosystem. Vultures have ecological, social and cultural significance in India. Vultures, being the natural scavengers, play a very important role in quickly disposing carcasses that could harbour millions of pathogenic organisms bacteria and fungus and cause serious implications for human and animal health. A number of conservation measures are being taken by the Government of India and State Governments for the conservation and protection of Vultures.

As a key signatory to the CMS Raptors MoU, India launched its five-year Action Plan for Vulture Conservation in India (2020-2025) in November, 2020. The Action Plan has identified priority actions for the conservation of vultures and their habitats. It also advocates prevention of misuse of veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and awareness of the importance of conservation of vultures.

The other important aspects of the Action Plan are to institute a system, which automatically removes a drug from veterinary use if it is found to be toxic to vultures, establishment of additional Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres (VCBCs), Vulture safe zones in every State and establishment of dedicated vulture rescue centres in the country. So far, the focus was on conservation of Gyps species of vultures, but now, the conservation breeding programmes of Red Headed Vultures and Egyptian Vultures would be also initiated. The APVC (2020-2025) will also draw expertise and advice, from the existing Regional Steering Committee (RSC) for Coordination with various countries in South Asia which are within the distribution range of the vultures, as well as from SAVE

(Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction), a consortium of NGOs and International Conservation Organizations which are actively working towards conservation of South Asian Vultures. **This Action Plan is in sync with Resolution UNEP/CMS/ Resolution 11.15(Rev.COP13) regarding " Preventing poisoning of Migratory Birds", besides, being a step towards implementing CMS COP-13 Decision 13.50 regarding 'Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Vultures'.**



Conservation Of Migratory Birds

India is taking concrete steps for conservation of migratory birds including Amur Falcons. Community based interventions were done during the year 2020 while maintaining the Covid protocols. The success of conservation of Amur Falcons through community led actions have been replicated in other States of India like Manipur, Mizoram and Assam.

India has been also actively contributing to the Saker Falcon Task Force for issues concerning mitigating electrocutions and development of an adaptive management framework for sustainable use of the species. **This initiative is a step forward for taking up the Resolution implementation of UNEP/CMS/ Resolution 12.26 (Rev.COP13) regarding “Improving ways of addressing connectivity in the conservation of migratory species”.**



Advisory on Exotic Animals

In India, several species are listed in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and are protected. However, exotic species are imported to India and bred in captivity without proper registration. Considering this, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had issued an Advisory for Voluntary Disclosure of Exotic Live Species, with the objectives of creating a unified information system of the stock of exotic live species at the State/Central level through voluntary disclosure and the use of that database towards controlling and management of zoonotic diseases, and for facilitating better management of the species and providing guidance to their

holders for their proper care and well-being. The entire registration process has been made through a hassle free online system for the benefit of the importers and owners of exotic live animals as well as for the concerned authorities. This effort of the Ministry has also been lauded by the Hon'ble Apex Court of India. Ministry is contemplating to widening the scope of the advisory to include non CITES listed exotic species also. **This initiative is also in sync with CMS COP 13 Decision 13.16 to 13.19 in connection with international trade in Appendix -I listed migratory species.**



Snow Leopard Conservation

India is taking concrete steps in conservation of Snow Leopard by playing a pivotal role in the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP). Recently, with a view to involve the local communities, “Himal Sanrakshak – Community Volunteer Programme”, that aims to identify, recognize and build the capacities of dynamic youth and women towards wildlife conservation, sustainable use of biological resources, combating illegal trade in wildlife, mitigating human wildlife conflict and biodiversity governance, was launched on 23rd October, 2020 on the International Snow Leopard Day. The programme is

developing a cadre of 100 volunteers from local community in the Himalayan region to support the government in conservation and sustainable management of high-altitude ecosystems through participatory approaches. **This initiative is in line with the CMS COP 13 Decision 13.119-13.120 regarding ‘Community participation and livelihood’ besides Resolution UNEP/CMS/Resolution 11.10 (Rev.COP13) regarding ‘Synergies and Partnerships’ wherein Parties have been encouraged to strengthen engagement with indigenous peoples, youth groups and local communities across the CMS Family.**



Central Asian Flyway

India has developed its National Action Plan for conservation of migratory birds along the Central Asian Flyway. In pursuance of UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.11 (Rev. COP 13) on flyways and CMS COP 13 decision - 13.46, India has taken initiatives for creating a common platform for promoting research, capacity building and conservation initiatives and is finalizing a programme in association with the CMS Secretariat to build the capacity of CAF range countries for preparation of thier respective National Action Plans for conservation of migratory birds along the Central Asian Flyway.



**Ministry of Environment, Forest
and Climate Change**

Government of India