UN Conference starts in India to protect wild animals

Civil Society needs to play a more significant role in international decision-making to avert devastating species loss

Wädenswil/Gandhinagar, 16th February 2020. From 17th to 22nd February 2020, around 2,500 delegates from 130 states, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations get together in Gandhinagar, India, for the 13th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) to discuss collective approaches to protect migratory animals in the face of unprecedented biodiversity loss. Increasing habitat fragmentation and the severe consequences of climate change pose a significant risk to lose even more avian, marine and terrestrial species. The international marine conservation organisation OceanCare, official partner of CMS, calls on governments to formally increase and facilitate the role of civil society in the decision-making process and to implement urgent conservation action without any further delay.

Across the world, wildlife is being lost because of unimpeded human activities. Currently, we entrust it to government officials to safeguard the natural world from extinction. Local communities are usually not even on site, and organisations involved in species and environmental protection are only allowed to attend as observers, but are not involved in the decision-making process.

“Civil society is fundamentally driving, facilitating and implementing conservation action in the field. On the other hand, States are often failing to turn conservation decisions into practice. We call upon contracting parties to improve the formal role of civil society and elevate their voices into international decision-making, to avert further species loss,” says Fabienne McLellan, Co-Director of International Relations at OceanCare. This call follows a report by WILD MIGRATION, which puts forward a set of recommendations after interviewing CMS partner organisations. The report, released at this meeting, quantifies the monetary contributions by the partner organisations towards CMS-related work with 20 million US$ annually.

In an interconnected world, wildlife faces difficult challenges as they move across borders of many countries during their migrations. “There is a knock-on effect,” says Maximin Djondo, OceanCare policy consultant and wildmeat expert from Benin, West Africa, when talking about the reasons for illegal and unsustainable hunts of dolphins, manatees, seabirds, turtles and many other marine and coastal animals. “Overfishing caused by large industrial fishing fleets pressures local fishermen to search for alternative sources of protein. Hunting of threatened species has increased,” Djondo explains. Together with officials from Mauritania, Senegal and Benin, OceanCare is hosting a side event on the first day of the conference to address the issue of aquatic wildmeat and to stress the necessity for a regional Action Plan for West Africa which includes managing large fisheries.

This is one out of many issues that describe the interdependency of various causalities. The impacts of climate change on wildlife is another global challenge stimulating the debate about the biodiversity agenda, “We are losing the race, if we maintain our current pace. To turn the tide, we need to optimise the implementation of conservation action,” says Nicolas Entrup, head of the OceanCare delegation, at the conference in India. “Bushfires are one of the extreme impacts with devastating consequences, but there is more of such worrying trends putting wildlife and people at risk. Yet, we have the knowledge to act differently. Stopping the search for oil and gas in the seabed would stop the loudest noise source in the ocean and prevent continued severe impacts on all marine wildlife”, he adds.
CMS, also known as the Bonn Convention, is a UN Agreement on animal species whose populations regularly cross national borders on their migrations, including migratory birds, terrestrial species like elephants and lions, and marine species such as cetaceans, sharks and turtles. The Agreement is aimed at close cooperation of states who share a species' range, which includes wintering and foraging areas, as well as migration routes.

Further links and information:
- Media briefings Dropbox
- OceanCare website: https://www.oceancare.org/en/
- Report by Margi Prideaux, WILD Migration: “Conservation Collaboration”
- Policy briefings and further information: www.oceancare.org/cmscop13_conf-docs
- Information about the conference: www.cms.int
- The theme of the conference is ‘CONNECTIVITY’: The concept captures that the various conservation treaties are interlinked, that there is a need to connect to protect wildlife, and that habitats of migratory species need to be connected.
- Follow discussions on social media: #CMSCOP13

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About OceanCare

OceanCare is a Swiss non-profit organisation. It was founded in 1989 and has a strong commitment to realistic and cooperative initiatives. The organisation works at national and international level in the areas of marine pollution, environmental changes, fisheries, whaling, sealing, captivity of marine mammals and public education.

OceanCare holds Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and is partner of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the UNEP/CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) and UNEP/MAP. OceanCare has also been accredited as a Major Group to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which is the governing body of UNEP and is a part of the UNEP Global Partnership on Marine Litter.