



**The II International Scientific and
Practical Conference
"Eagles of Palearctic:
Study and Conservation"**

**7–10 September 2018
Park-Hotel "Lake Aya",
Altai Kray, Russia**

LETTER OF PROPOSAL

ON THE NEED TO CREATE A GLOBAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE STEPPE EAGLE

To:

Birds of Prey (Raptors) Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia Convention on Migratory Species Office
Abu Dhabi United Nations Environment Programme
c/o Environment Agency Abu Dhabi

From:

an international group of experts, as a result of the round table on the Steppe Eagle
at the II International scientific and practical conference "Eagles of Palearctic: Study and Conservation"

The Steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) is an iconic migrant species that has a huge global distribution. In recent times it has suffered large population declines and apparent contraction of its distribution, resulting in it being classified by IUCN as globally Endangered (2017), Critically Endangered in Europe (2015), and placed amongst Category 1 species under the Raptors MOU.

A wide range of threats to Steppe eagles exists, and can vary across its wide range. Furthermore, because the Steppe eagle is a long range migrant, threats on the breeding grounds are often very different than those in non-breeding areas. A short-list of threats includes electrocution, targeted and inadvertent poisoning, persecution, habitat loss and habitat destruction, and changes in food availability, but other threats exist. The large number and wide variety of threats and the fact that threats can change as eagles migrate across many countries means that conserving them can be challenging. The development of a plan for Steppe eagle conservation that considers the complex nature of the threats and the national, regional, international scales at which they occur is an important first step in ensuring effective and efficient conservation across its range.

As part of an international conference on “Eagles of the Palearctic” held in Altai Kray, Russia (7–9 September 2018), a special session of presentations was convened and attended by many of the world’s active Steppe eagle researchers and conservationists. Some of those attending then gathered to consider and discuss the possibility of developing an international single species action plan for the Steppe eagle. As a result of those discussions it was decided that the drafting of a species action plan for Steppe eagle would indeed be useful. We are writing to report, in general terms, the results of those discussions and to suggest possible first-steps in the way forward.

In view of the information presented at the conference and the expert knowledge held by those gathered, we compiled a non-specific, non-exhaustive list of issues and activities a plan might contain, including:

- Conducting a comprehensive literature review and compiling information from questionnaires completed by experts and people with relevant knowledge from across the range;
- Identifying and filling in gaps in our knowledge about the conservation status and distribution of Steppe eagle across its global range, covering breeding areas, migration routes, and wintering areas of all populations;
- Understanding better the factors influencing the distribution and productivity of eagles on their breeding grounds;
- Understanding better threats facing eagles in breeding areas, on migration and in non-breeding areas;
- Understanding the causes of the apparently high mortality rate in adult cohorts of Steppe eagle during the last decade;
- Gathering more information about the migration of Steppe eagles by using telemetry technology and colour marking;
- Developing a network of migration watches, most importantly at bottleneck locations to help monitor population status and demography, and for their potential in public conservation education;
- Identifying specific activities to address known threats to eagles (e.g. electrocution in some places, wind farm construction, fires and habitat loss in breeding areas, NSAID poisoning in India and Pakistan and probably in other wintering areas);
- Gathering information on the ecology and threats faced by eagles on their wintering grounds;
- Investigating the possibility that eagle wintering distribution is changing, and such changes might affect their conservation;
- Identifying conservation education opportunities, targeting especially the public, in the countries in which Steppe eagle occurs;
- Identifying appropriate national-level conservation instruments for improved Steppe eagle protection, and making recommendations to national conservation bodies;
- Developing international instruments for the day-to-day coordination and cooperation between many governmental and non-governmental stakeholders aimed at Steppe eagle conservation on regional and international levels, and
- A plan for securing the funding necessary for at least the highest priority activities.

As a first step we agreed that a task force for developing the Steppe Eagle Action Plan should be formed. Twelve of the assembled experts and three expert in absentia (App. I), representing 9 countries, agreed to serving on the task force. A number of the experts had experience in contributing to action plans for other species.

While much work on and Steppe eagle action plan could and would be done by volunteers or through employees of governments and NGO's, we thought it was essential that a single person be given the responsibility for drafting the action plan, and that person should be paid for the work. So, although we list some priorities for inclusion in the action plan, we feel that the most immediate priority will be securing the funding for and hiring this lead person. Simultaneously, necessary funding and other resources will need to be assembled to see the development of the plan to its conclusion, including support for some number of meetings of the task force and action plan workshops.

In summary, we think that an international single species action plan for Steppe eagle would be useful, and we already have access to or hold quite a bit of valuable information. Furthermore, many threats are known, and we have some ideas about addressing some of those in some places. We understand that developing a plan, especially for a species whose annual range is so large and covering so many countries, is not easy. Although we think it is essential that a coordinator is identified and paid to take the work forward, we the undersigned undertake to make what contributions we can to this effort. CMS/Raptors MOU has already provided support, and for this we are very grateful because it has facilitated this preliminary step towards the development of an action plan.

We hope this letter will be the beginning of a valuable exercise that will help Steppe eagle conservation, and look forward to suggestions from you as to how we might take the next steps.

On behalf of the Conference participants

Secretary of the Conference

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APPENDIX I.

List of international group of experts, who agreed to serving on the task force for the Steppe Eagle Action Plan development

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