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UAE protects migratory birds

Emirates longtime signatory to major conventions to conserve sanctuaries along flyways

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 Derek Baldwin, Chief Reporter

Every effort matters, said the organisation, given growing threats to migrating birds along their routes.

Comprising 119 conservation partner groups around the world, BirdLife International says that every "autumn, over two billion passerine and near-passerine birds, having bred in Europe and central and western Asia, migrate south to winter in tropical Africa. During this southern passage and on their return journeys in spring, these birds encounter considerable hunting pressure. The death toll is staggering, with the number of migratory birds killed annually nearing 500 million. Many of these birds are shot and trapped in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East that border the Mediterranean".

The organisation said: "Populations of migratory birds that breed in temperate regions and winter in the tropics have suffered sustained and often severe declines over the past few decades."

In its country profile of the UAE, BirdLife International reveals that the UAE has been fully engaged in protecting birds as a party to 16 global and regional agreements and conventions over the decades.

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The UAE, for example, is a signatory to a number of critical global efforts sponsored by the United Nations to protect bird species, including the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS, also known as the Bonn Convention) as well as the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA).

Under such agreements, in the UAE, 19 important bird areas have been officially recognised encompassing 257,990 hectares visited by 296 bird species, said the organisation. The bird areas provide sanctuary for 12 bird species identified as globally threatened.

Late last year, the UAE was one of 200 parties in a meeting in Bonn that strengthened the AEWA agreement, administered by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), with 22 new resolutions, including action plans for highly threatened seabirds and guidelines for the sustainable use of waterbirds.

The new resolutions will help protect migratory waterbirds such as "storks, ducks, geese and the African penguin which are especially vulnerable to a wide range of threats along their often long migration routes across Africa and Eurasia", said UNEP in a statement.

Jacques Trouvilliez, executive secretary of AEWA, said, "AEWA forms a bridge between Eurasia and Africa, which is indispensable for the conservation of transcontinental migrants. The objectives of the EU Birds Directive adopted in 1979 cannot fully be achieved if actions are limited to just the political dimension. AEWA allows concerted actions to be launched throughout the flyway which extends from Russia to South Africa; however, the pressures on the birds vary from north to south."

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