



MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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on the occasion of

WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

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“Their Future is Our Future”

Every year, millions of migratory birds fly across continents and national borders. They can often involve incredible feats of navigation and endurance. These amazing journeys depend on the availability of well-functioning and healthy ecosystems.

Take the Red Knot. This sandpiper makes one of the planet’s most amazing migrations. After wintering in the southern reaches of Argentina and Chile, many Red Knots make a daunting 14,000 kilometre journey along the Atlantic flyway all the way up to their breeding grounds in the Arctic. Come fall, they return south, following the same route. And even though the Red Knot can fly some 2,4000 kilometres without rest, a voyage like that does require fuel, and the occasional stopover.

Unfortunately, the essential resting, feeding and breeding grounds upon which the Red Knot depend are increasingly being degraded and fragmented. Along the Atlantic flyway, overharvesting of the Atlantic horseshoe crab, whose eggs the birds feed on during their migration, and habitat loss due to development and climate change, are of particular concern. Other threats to migratory birds can include land use change, including overharvesting, invasive alien species, pollution and a variety of human-made impacts including climate change.

But why, you might ask, should I care? Migratory birds are a vital part of biodiversity and play a critical role in maintaining ecosystems worldwide. They serve key functions in the interconnected systems that keep nature healthy – including pollination and seed dispersal of crops for human and livestock consumption, as well as pest regulation. Migratory birds also serve as a source of food and economically and/or culturally important activities such as hunting, tourism and recreation. They and their journeys are also a source of pride for cultures worldwide. Consequently, the conservation and sustainable use of migratory species is a key contribution to other global priorities, such as sustainable development.

Around the world, countries, communities and organizations are building networks to help improve migratory connectivity. This includes enhancing corridors and protecting flyways and breeding grounds. One example is the Kenya Lakes System of protected areas in the Great Rift Valley. A natural landscape of outstanding beauty, the Kenya Lakes System comprises three lakes and is home to 13 globally threatened bird species, including a number of migratory birds, such as the Great White Pelican.

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets, a ten-year framework for action on biodiversity by all countries and stakeholders, support these efforts, including Target 11, which calls for protected areas to be part of a connected system, integrated into wider land and seascapes, and Target 12 on threatened species.

Much like how a canary in a coal mine alerts miners to the perils of methane or carbon monoxide in a mine, migratory birds can provide indications about the status and trends affecting biodiversity more broadly. According to the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, many sites identified as at-risk conservation areas for birds also host numerous other threatened species of plants and animals. Therefore, priority sites for migratory bird conservation often represent hot spots for other biodiversity as well.

Today, on World Migratory Bird Day, we recognize that the future of migratory birds is our future. By conserving and sustainably using our natural resources, we not only help these wonderful creatures on their spectacular travels, we contribute to our own wellbeing.
