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PRESS RELEASE

Over 40 countries work together to improve the conservation status of migratory birds of prey

**UNEP Convention on Migratory Species convenes international meeting to combat threats to
migratory raptors**

Abu Dhabi, 6 December 2012 – For the first time, 100 representatives from more than 40 countries will come together to discuss urgent actions to step up protection for threatened species of migratory birds of prey.

This gathering from 9- 11 December is the 1st Meeting of Signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MoU), convened under the auspices of the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species. His Excellency Mohammad Ahmad Al Bowardi, Managing Director, Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD), has been invited to open the meeting.

The Meeting of Signatories represents the first opportunity to bring together representatives from the 40 Signatories to the Raptors MoU. In addition, observers representing other Range States and interested parties will attend. The overall aim of the meeting is to review the implementation of the Action Plan contained within the Raptors MoU, and to identify the future policies and priorities for this important international conservation agreement. Some Range States are expected to sign the Raptors MoU during the meeting.

The Raptors MoU covers 76 migratory species of birds of prey and owls, which occur in 130 Range States in Africa and Eurasia. Due to the generous support of the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates, an Interim Coordinating Unit (ICU) was established in 2009, as a key component of the UNEP/CMS Office in Abu Dhabi, to act as the secretariat to the Raptors MoU.

Raptors are critical components within our natural environment. They provide a unique range of ecosystem services, such as reducing disease by consuming dead animals in the case of vultures and other carrion eaters. And many falcons feed on large numbers of aerial insects which are considered pests by the agricultural and horticultural industries. Being at the top of the food chain these predators can be used to act as 'sentinel' species to indicate the levels of prey populations and also the overall health of the ecosystem.

All birds of prey are exposed to a range of threats but migratory raptors are particularly at risk due to the often long and arduous annual journeys they make from their breeding grounds to wintering areas, and back again. The main threats faced by raptors today are human-induced. Loss, degradation and fragmentation of habitats due to construction for housing, industry and infrastructure; intensification of agricultural and other land-use practices lead to declines in prey populations; increased mortality due to losses associated with human persecution such as shooting, poisoning, disturbance; contamination from organochlorines or other pesticides can lead to reduced

breeding success; and, unsustainable or illegal capture, particularly for trade can accelerate decreasing population levels.

Some migratory raptors have suffered major population declines in recent years, for example, Egyptian Vulture, Saker Falcon and Sooty Falcon – all of these species are important components of UAE's rich biodiversity. The ICU is working to develop and facilitate international collaborative projects to help conserve these and other migratory birds of prey. It oversees the Saker Falcon Task Force, established in 2012 to develop a Global Action Plan to conserve the species, including creating mechanisms to allow long-term sustainable use for falconry purposes – a practice where falcons are trained to hunt quarry for food which has a long and cherished tradition, particularly in the Gulf States. Plans are also being developed to gather information about the plight of the Sooty Falcon, a species specially adapted to breed in the harsh desert environments found in the Middle East and Gulf regions, but which annually flies South across coastal East Africa to winter on Madagascar.

Notes to editors:

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and action plans. CMS, which acts under the auspices of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is a rapidly expanding global biodiversity convention with special expertise in the field of migratory species. At present, 116 countries are Parties to the Convention.

For more information please visit: www.cms.int

The UNEP/CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MoU) is administered by the UNEP/CMS Office - Abu Dhabi. The MoU came into force on 1st November 2008 and has already been signed by 39 states and the EU. Current signatories (as at 1 December 2012) to the Raptors MoU are: Angola, Armenia, Belgium, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, European Union, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Guinea, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Slovakia, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Yemen.

For more information about the UNEP/CMS Raptors MoU, please visit: www.cms.int/species/raptors

For more information please contact: Nick P. Williams, UNEP/CMS Programme Officer (Raptors)
Email: nwilliams@cms.int
Tel: 050 260 5569