

Additionally, special exhibitions were organized during the Conference, including the Yellow Sea Wetland Museum, bird-watching equipment exhibits, and cultural and creative displays, as well as awards for nature notes and paintings to future coastal leaders, all aimed at raising public awareness of ecological conservation.

The Conference participants expressed their appreciation and gratitude for the work of the hosts and organisers. They recognised this opportunity to further explore and lead the way for coastal ecosystem protection, sustainable management and restoration, also as a contribution to the harmonious coexistence of people and nature in coastal regions around the world.

A personal contribution at the WCF by Terry Townsend, representing the Paulson Institute at the World Coastal Forum in Yancheng, Jiangsu Province:

“I was honoured to be invited to participate in a panel discussion at a side meeting of Prosecutors from all of China’s coastal provinces. One of the prosecutors asked, ‘what is the single thing we can do to support migratory birds?’ My answer? ‘Please control the sale of mist nets; a small action that could save the lives of millions of migratory birds every year’. I’ve been invited to submit a short background paper and, although I’ll be surprised if this is acted on immediately, hopefully it will at least begin a conversation and, ideally, the commissioning of a research paper on the scale of the issue and the potential to introduce some kind of licensing system to limit the sale of these almost invisible indiscriminate killers for scientific purposes only”.

WCF: A personal perspective from the editor:

From my perspective this was the most important conference since the ‘Project Mar Conference’ held in the south of France in 1962 under the leadership of Luc Hoffmann, which was ratified as the ‘Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat’ in the town of Ramsar in Iran. I was present at the Mar Conference (as a member of the support staff), but unfortunately not the WCF!

How can we further advance migratory shorebird conservation through international

agreements?

By: Ed Gallo-Cajiao (Colorado State University, e.gallocajiao@colostate.edu), Tiffany H. Morrison (James Cook University and The University of Melbourne), Richard A. Fuller (The University of Queensland)

International agreements are a well-known fixture of migratory shorebird conservation in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF), so a look at them may provide clues to inform ways to advance their conservation. There are now 28 such international agreements in the EAAF (Gallo-Cajiao et al. 2019). The first was the US-Japan Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Birds, signed all the way back in 1972. Following this landmark agreement, 10 bilateral agreements have been developed in the EAAF, of which Australia has signed three, involving Japan, China, and the Republic of Korea. Other agreements include the Convention on Migratory Species, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), to name but a few.

Against this backdrop, a key question relevant to conservation is whether this set of agreements covers the full life cycle of migratory shorebirds within the flyway relative to their threats. With two pressing and imminent threats to migratory shorebirds in the EAAF, namely habitat loss and hunting, we studied what such agreements cover, how they enable coordination, as well as how well they protect the flyway by country and shorebirds’ migratory cycle (Gallo-Cajiao et al. 2024).

Encouragingly, we found that agreements for addressing habitat loss and hunting cover the entire flyway, albeit with some variation. First, there are more agreements for habitat conservation than for hunting management. Second, agreements for habitat conservation include a variety of members, such as national governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations, whereas members were restricted to national governments in the case of agreements for hunting management. Third, the agreements around habitat conservation were built into a strong web of connections among members, but those for hunting management were much sparser. The EAAFP emerged as the most central agreement in the flyway, and notably there was no agreement in place allowing for flyway-wide coordination of hunting management. Lastly, agreements for habitat conservation covered more thoroughly the

migratory cycle of shorebirds than those focused on hunting management.

Many of the agreements have emerged as a response to conservation pressures, such as coastal reclamation. Consequently, it may perhaps be no coincidence that some of those agreements have converged around the Yellow Sea in recent times. However, it is important to acknowledge that each new agreement draws personal energy, political attention, and financial resources for negotiation. So, we should ask if any additional agreements are worthwhile, considering there are already 19 agreements for habitat conservation and 16 for hunting management within this flyway.

We recommend, based on these results, that the issue of habitat conservation requires no further agreements, but does need a much stronger focus on implementation. Specifically, the EAAFP and associated 'Flyway Site Network' could be further expanded and implemented by focusing on ways to improve the management of each site that has been designated with the support of additional habitat conservation agreements, such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. In the case of hunting management, a central coordinating agreement is still lacking, which is a significant problem. Hunting management needs to account for flyway-wide mortality and quota allocations per country, and there is no mechanism as yet for achieving this in the EAAF. The two task forces on hunting currently in operation under the Convention on Migratory Species and the EAAFP are an important step towards filling this notable gap.

In short, a focus on additional site designation and improving site management for addressing habitat loss with the EAAFP as a centerpiece is recommended, while further advancing flyway-wide coordination for hunting management through the existing task forces would help address this threat more effectively.

Severe threat to Australian Ramsar site halted

BirdLife Australia are celebrating the news that an immensely irresponsible real-estate proposal which threatened critical habitat for migratory birds has been officially withdrawn after a decade of resistance from the Australian community and environmental organisations. The site of the proposal was Toondah Harbour near Brisbane, part of the internationally significant Moreton Bay wetland Ramsar area, a critical habitat for wildlife,

including the Eastern Curlew.

The formal withdrawal follows the announcement from Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek that she intended to reject the proposal made by Walker Corporation, one of Australia's wealthiest real estate developers, citing unacceptable impacts to wildlife like the Critically Endangered Eastern Curlew and the internationally significant of the wetlands.

"This is a win for nature and a win for the community", said BirdLife Australia CEO, Kate Millar. "We are celebrating, but we are not resting. We've won this battle because of the sustained pressure and opposition from everyday Australians, led by a dedicated group of local nature lovers. This is a battle that should never have needed to be fought."

The impacts of the proposal were known in 2017 when former Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg rejected the advice from his own department that the proposal was "clearly unacceptable" and allowed it to proceed to the next stage of approval. Ms Millar said this kind of ministerial power is why our [nature laws are broken](#). "It's currently far too easy for ministers to override Australia's nature laws, and that is simply seen as an invitation for some big businesses to undermine them."

The Albanese Government is currently reviewing Australia's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. Earlier this week, Minister Plibersek announced the establishment of an independent Environment Protection Agency (EPA), claiming the new body will have strong new powers to better protect nature. But environmental organisations, including BirdLife Australia are yet to be convinced.

"Australia's broken nature laws still need to be fixed, then properly enforced. Otherwise, the new EPA is being set up to fail," said Millar. "10 years of fighting for Toondah Harbour has shown us that the current Ministerial powers enable a way around the law. Allowing exemptions will not stop extinctions."

For now, members of the local community and environmental organisations, including BirdLife Australia, who've campaigned against Walker Corporation's proposal for a decade are breathing a sigh of relief. "We're thrilled," said Ms Millar. "We want to thank everyone who's worked so hard to get to this outcome. It's because of them that Toondah's wetlands and the birds they sustain will now remain protected."