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Beijing, China

REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda)

Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

Note by the secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) Nature Conservation Strategy was adopted at the twelfth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-12) in 2007.¹ The nature conservation programme is based on a two-track approach: one for the targeted feline species and the other for migratory birds and their habitats. Within this framework, NEASPEC has been implementing projects on the conservation of its six flagship species including three feline species (Amur tiger, Amur leopard and Snow leopard) and three migratory bird species (Black-faced spoonbill, White-naped crane and Hooded crane) in connection with the overall goals of the strategy. These projects aim to contribute to a biodiversity conservation strategy by promoting transboundary and intergovernmental cooperation and enhancing coordinated mechanisms for the target species and their habitats.

Conservation of targeted feline species

2. Big feline species, including the Amur tiger, Amur leopard, and Snow leopard, are vital to North-East Asia's biodiversity but continue to face severe threats from habitat fragmentation, poaching, and human-wildlife conflict. Despite efforts to protect these species, ecological corridors that connect habitats across borders remain underdeveloped, limiting the movement and genetic diversity of these endangered populations. Furthermore, effective cross-border cooperation and sustainable habitat management practices are crucial but still require strengthened mechanisms and increased stakeholder engagement.

3. Addressing these challenges, NEASPEC is focused on enhancing transboundary conservation efforts, developing ecological corridors, and fostering partnerships to secure the long-term sustainability of big feline populations in the region.

Transboundary Cooperation on the Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards, and Snow Leopards in North-East Asia” project (2020-2022)

4. From 2020 to 2022, the secretariat implemented the “Transboundary Cooperation on the Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards, and Snow Leopards in North-East Asia” project, following approval by the twenty-third Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-23) in 2019. Financially supported by the Government of the Russian Federation, the project includes three components jointly developed by experts from China, Mongolia, and the Russian Federation.

5. Interim outcomes were reviewed during a virtual workshop on big cat conservation in North-East Asia held on 12 October 2021, where project partners emphasized the importance of

¹ http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Publication_SavingNatureConservation_2.pdf

joint cross-border protected areas, ecological corridors, and an effective cooperation mechanism for habitat management among neighbouring countries.

6. As a follow-up to the project component 3, a new project concept, “Evaluation of the Current Status of Transboundary Snow Leopard Subpopulations in the Border Area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation,” was proposed to NEASPEC National Focal Points in June 2022 for ad-hoc approval and subsequently implemented in August 2022.

7. The project concluded in December 2022, and a completion note summarizing key activities and recommendations from implementing partners’ progress reports was presented at the twenty-sixth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-26) in November 2023; it is accessible on NEASPEC’s website.²

Conservation of migratory birds and habitats

8. Migratory birds are key biological indicators of ecological connectivity across North-East Asia, linking multiple countries into a unified ecological community. However, they face mounting threats from habitat loss, climate change, and increased human activity, which jeopardize key stopover sites critical for their survival. Despite efforts to designate protected areas, these habitats often fall short of providing the necessary ecological connectivity across countries. Additional challenges arise from infrastructure developments, such as energy projects and agricultural expansion, which disrupt migratory patterns and breeding grounds.

9. To address these issues, NEASPEC commits on advancing transboundary cooperation efforts and strengthening conservation initiatives, focusing on comprehensive habitat protection, monitoring, and capacity-building to ensure the long-term sustainability of migratory bird populations.

Transboundary Cooperation among Protected Wetlands in the Lower Tumen River Area

10. Surveys and studies conducted in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and Dauria International Protected Areas (DIPA) from 2014-2016 contained findings that while there is potential for multilateral conservation efforts, current protected areas are insufficient for safeguarding these species, and key habitats are inadequately protected by national policies in these regions. In response, a 2017 study by the Korea Environment Institute (KEI) and the secretariat included a recommendation creating a “North-East Asia Transboundary Protected Areas Network” to support the long-term conservation of vulnerable species and landscapes, highlighting the lower Tumen River transboundary area as a case for coordinated efforts. Delegations from member States at the twenty-second Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-22) and the

²²² [Item 5\(b\)-Annex II. Completion note Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers.pdf](#)

twenty-third Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-23) supported this direction, approving further studies in key wetlands.

11. Following these recommendations, a 2019–2020 study places an emphasis on the ecological importance of the Jingxin (China) and Khasan (Russia) wetlands' roles in ecosystem health and socio-economic development. Preliminary study findings were discussed in a May 2020 Expert Group Meeting with officials, national experts, and Ramsar Convention representatives. The final report was completed and presented at the twenty-sixth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-26) in November 2023. Key recommendations include strengthening conservation commitments, enhancing partnerships, joint monitoring, and capacity building among China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation for effective transboundary conservation.

Revised Black-faced Spoonbills Action Plan

12. In response to ongoing challenges and new threats facing the Black-faced Spoonbill—a NEASPEC flagship species—such as habitat loss, avian influenza, and disruptions from energy infrastructure, the representatives from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Hong Kong and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Black-faced Spoonbill Working Group proposed a revised Black-faced Spoonbill Action Plan to guide conservation from 2026 to 2036 under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

13. This third edition of the action plan aims to build on past achievements while expanding the range of stakeholders and geographic scope. With recent population growth and the ongoing need for dedicated conservation, the updated plan would encompass different countries, from the Russian Federation and the Korean Peninsula to Southeast Asia and align with regional biodiversity targets. The preliminary concept note is provided in the Annex I.

II. (A) PROGRESS OF THE ACTIVITIES ON BIODIVERSITY AND NATURE CONSERVATION

Nature Conservation and Biodiversity for Transboundary Cooperation workshop

14. A “Nature Conservation and Biodiversity for Transboundary Cooperation workshop”, held on 28-29 August 2024 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, brought together 61 participants to review NEASPEC’s past and current conservation projects and outline future strategies. First workshop since 2017, it placed an emphasis on the importance of transboundary ecological connectivity in North-East Asia, delving into deep dives on two components, namely big cats and migratory birds. The workshop report is provided in Annex II.

15. The workshop's key outcomes included recommendations to guide the upcoming NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030 and experts' insights for the new Connectivity Conservation for Habitats of Flagship Migratory Birds in North-East Asia project. Furthermore, the participants of the workshop highlighted growing demands for an enhanced information-sharing platform to support regional conservation efforts. The summary of such key outcomes is provided in Annex III.

III. (B) PROGRESS OF THE ACTIVITIES ON CONSERVATION OF BIG FELINE SPECIES

Evaluation of the project on "Transboundary Cooperation on the Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards, and Snow Leopards in North-East Asia"

16. In accordance with the norms, standards and procedures set out in the "ESCAP monitoring and evaluation: policy and guidelines",³ an evaluation on the "Transboundary Cooperation on the Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards, and Snow Leopards in North-East Asia" project was conducted from January to July 2023 by Dr. Bishwa N. Paudyal, a Guyana-based independent consultant.

17. The evaluation report is focused on the project's milestones in fostering coordinated conservation efforts among China, Mongolia, and the Russian Federation from January 2020 to December 2022. The evaluation contains a note about the project creating an enabling environment for policy dialogue, including steps toward establishing a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park, enhancing scientific monitoring for endangered species, and advancing evidence-based conservation policies. Key achievements include strengthened transboundary cooperation, knowledge sharing, and stakeholder engagement across multiple conservation activities.

18. The evaluation includes recommendations on further engagement with local communities, prioritizing capacity building and scientific research, and scaling up efforts for broader impact and sustainability. The full evaluation report is made available on ESCAP's website.⁴

³ [ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation \(unescap.org\)](https://www.unescap.org/monitoring-and-evaluation)

⁴ Evaluation of the project on Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia (2023)
<https://repository.unescap.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12870/6674/ESCAP-2023-RP-Transboundary-cooperation-conservation-Amur-tigers-Amur-leopards-Snow-leopards-ENEa.pdf?sequence=4>

IV. (C) PROGRESS OF THE ACTIVITIES ON CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY BIRDS AND HABITATS

Progress of the project on “Connectivity Conservation for Habitats of Flagship Migratory Birds in North-East Asia”

19. Aligned with the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy adopted by member States, the secretariat prepared and gained approval in May 2024 for a new project, Connectivity Conservation for Habitats of Flagship Migratory Birds in North-East Asia (Black-faced Spoonbills, Hooded Cranes, and White-naped Cranes), with funding of US\$299,789 from the Russian Federation. The approved project document is provided in Annex XI.

20. The concept of the project was formulated based on recommendations from the 2014-2016 NEASPEC initiative, promoting consistency and continuity in NEASPEC’s conservation efforts and specifically targets NEASPEC’s three flagship migratory bird species and their habitats to strengthen member States’ transboundary cooperation and capacity for monitoring, assessing, and managing these species and their environments. Notably, the Black-faced Spoonbill is classified as endangered, while the Hooded Crane and White-naped Crane are recognized as threatened species by the IUCN.

21. Its main areas of focus are: (1) demographic studies of the three flagship species and the influence of environmental, social, and economic factors on their habitats, (2) analytical studies on impacts by energy infrastructure and agricultural activities, and (3) capacity-building for stakeholders, with a special focus on empowering youth and women. Consequently, the project includes activities supporting the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Sustainable Development Goals 13 (Climate Action), 15 (Life on Land), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), ESCAP’s Regional Roadmap for Implementing the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific, and broader regional conservation initiatives that bring together government and grassroots actors alike.

22. As part of the second component of the project, the secretariat initiated a study under the consultancy contract with Dr. Who-Seung Lee from the Korea Environment Institute (KEI). This study is focused on (1) examining baseline information on the impacts of energy infrastructure on migratory birds and (2) conducting scenario analysis including various factors such as proximity to breeding sites, mortality rates, and the overall effect on population stability within the North-East Asian context. A provisional scope of the study is provided in Annex IV.

23. During the “Nature Conservation and Biodiversity for Transboundary Cooperation workshop”, held on August 28-29, 2024, migratory bird experts from North-East Asia reviewed

the project document, offering insights for its improvement. The summary of these recommendations is provided in Annex III.

V. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

24. The meeting may wish to request member States the following:
 - (a) Provide their views on the completed and ongoing activities on (i) big cat species and their habitats, (ii) migratory birds and their habitats, and (iii) transboundary cooperation on the Tumen River area, including outcomes and recommendations.
 - (b) Consider supporting NEASPEC's involvement in the revised Black-faced Spoonbill Action Plan to ensure comprehensive, coordinated efforts for the species' recovery and habitat protection.

25. The meeting may also wish to review and approve the proposed activity plan for 2025 (Annex V).

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