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Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC)

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Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

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. Since the adoption of the Nature Conservation Strategy at the twelfth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-12) in 2007, the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) has actively promoted transboundary and intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms for nature conservation in the subregion. Guided by a two-track approach, NEASPEC's biodiversity programme focuses on (1) big cat species and (2) migratory birds and their habitats. Within this framework, the secretariat has implemented targeted projects for six flagship species, comprising three big cats (Amur tiger, Amur leopard, and Snow leopard) and three migratory birds (Black-faced Spoonbill, White-naped Crane, and Hooded Crane), in alignment with the overarching objectives of the Strategy.

Conservation of migratory birds and habitats

2. Migratory birds serve as key biological indicators of ecological connectivity across North-East Asia, linking multiple countries into a unified ecological community. However, they face mounting threats such as habitat loss and climate change, which jeopardize 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 energy infrastructure development and agricultural expansion, which disrupt their migratory patterns and breeding grounds.

3. In response to these challenges, NEASPEC is strengthening transboundary cooperation efforts, with a focus on comprehensive habitat protection, monitoring, and capacity building to ensure the long-term sustainability of migratory bird populations. In this context, the secretariat secured approval in May 2024 for the project "Connectivity Conservation for Habitats of Flagship Migratory Birds in North-East Asia (Black-faced Spoonbills, Hooded Cranes, and White-naped Cranes)". Funded by the Russian Federation with a total of US\$299,789, the project will be implemented over the period 2024-2027.

4. To address ongoing and emerging threats to the Black-faced Spoonbill, representatives from WWF Hong Kong and the EAAFP Black-faced Spoonbill Working Group have proposed a revision of International Single Species Action Plan (ISSAP) for 2026-2036, under the coordination of NEASPEC. The third edition of the Action Plan seeks to build upon previous achievements while expanding stakeholder engagement and geographic coverage. This activity is well aligned with NEASPEC's strategic objectives, as reaffirmed at the twenty-seventh Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-27) in 2024.

Conservation of big feline species

5. Big feline species, including the Amur tiger, Amur leopard, and Snow leopard, are keystone species critical to the biodiversity of North-East Asia, yet they continue to face significant 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.

6. In response, NEASPEC has implemented the project “Transboundary Cooperation on the Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards, and Snow Leopards in North-East Asia” from 2020 to 2022, following its approval at the twenty-third Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-23) in 2019. A synthesis report consolidating the project’s key findings and outcomes is currently under preparation, in accordance with guidance received at the twenty-seventh Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-27).

7. Moreover, the “Workshop on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity for Transboundary Cooperation”, held on 28-29 August 2024 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, underscored the pressing need for an enhanced information-sharing platform to support regional big cat conservation. In this context, the twenty-seventh Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-27) endorsed the implementation of an integrated approach to developing an information-sharing platform for biodiversity conservation under NEASPEC.

II. PROGRESS OF THE ACTIVITIES ON CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY BIRD SPECIES AND HABITATS

Knowledge Production: Research and Policy Advice

8. The project “Connectivity Conservation for Habitats of Flagship Migratory Birds in North-East Asia”, funded by the Russian Federation, is currently under implementation by the secretariat. This project encompasses three core components: (1) simultaneous monitoring of the demographic trends of the target species and the influence of environmental, social, and economic factors on their habitats, (2) analytical studies on the impacts of energy infrastructure and agricultural practices, and (3) capacity-building for stakeholders, with particular emphasis on empowering youth and women. These activities are designed to contribute to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 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 subregional conservation initiatives that integrate both governmental and grassroots-level approaches.

9. The implementation of the project involves collaboration with external partners possessing specialized expertise in migratory bird conservation, capacity building, and regional coordination among NEASPEC member States. These partnerships are formalized through Letters of Agreement (LOAs), which are currently under development through mutual consultations. Under Component 1, implementing partners will conduct demographic studies of target species and assess the impacts of anthropogenic stressors within the subregion. To facilitate coordinated planning among implementing partners, a **“Consultation Meeting on the Project Connectivity Conservation for Habitats of Flagship Migratory Birds in North-East Asia”** will be convened on 10 September 2025 in Incheon, Republic of Korea. The concept note and programme are provided in Annex I.

10. As part of Component 2, the secretariat has developed an initial draft of a **technical study on the impact of energy infrastructure on flagship migratory birds**, in collaboration with Dr. Who-Seung Lee (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. Feedback from the implementing partners has been collected and incorporated into the draft. The draft report is included in Annex II.

11. Concurrently, the secretariat is coordinating the third **revision of the Black-faced Spoonbill International Single Species Action Plan (ISSAP)**, in partnership with WWF Hong Kong and the EAAFP Black-faced Spoonbill Working Group. This revised action plan aims to (1) assess the current population status and habitat conditions; (2) evaluate existing conservation measures; (3) identify emerging threats and knowledge gaps; and (4) formulate a comprehensive list of actions to support a sustainable conservation strategy at regional level. Finalization of the Action Plan is anticipated by November 2025, with formal submission to CMS scheduled for the first or second quarter of 2026.

12. Under the coordination of NEASPEC, the **Technical Review Meeting on the Draft Revised International Single Species Action Plan for the Black-faced Spoonbill** on 8-9 September 2025 will bring together key contributors and experts involved in the development of the revised Action Plan. The meeting will serve as a platform for detailed, chapter-by-chapter review, collaborative refinement, and exchange of technical expertise,

paving the way for a more robust and impactful revised ISSAP. The concept note and programme of the meeting are provided in Annex III.

Knowledge sharing: Knowledge Management and Capacity building

13. In parallel, NEASPEC organized the “**Training Workshop for Young Crane Researchers in North-East Asia**” on 6-8 July 2025 under the Component 3 of the project “**Connectivity Conservation for Habitats of Flagship Migratory Birds in North-East Asia**”, in collaboration with the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia (WSCC) and in partnership with the International Crane Foundation (ICF). The workshop was held at the Khurkh and Khuiten Nature Reserve in Mongolia, a site of critical ecological importance for crane conservation.

14. During the three-day workshop, approximately 30 early-career researchers and conservation practitioners from China, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation received targeted training in crane survey techniques, color banding, drone and remote sensing applications, wetland habitat assessment, data analysis, and conservation planning. Participants also engaged in field observations and hands-on exercises in crane monitoring, taking full advantage of the ecological significance of the workshop venue. Through a combination of expert-led lectures with field-based activities, the workshop contributed to strengthening regional technical capacity and fostering a transboundary network of young professionals committed to crane and wetland conservation across North-East Asia. The report of the workshop is provided in Annex IV.

III. PROGRESS OF THE ACTIVITIES ON CONSERVATION OF BIG FELINE SPECIES

Knowledge sharing: Knowledge Management and Capacity building

15. In response to priorities identified during the “Workshop on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity for Transboundary Cooperation” in 2024, the secretariat is in the process of developing a prototype **information-sharing platform** dedicated to biodiversity and nature conservation in North-East Asia. This initiative is being undertaken under a consultancy agreement with Ms. Jung-Eun Lim (National Institute of Ecology; NIE), and in close coordination with the ESCAP IT team.

16. Over a one-year period, the consultant will collect and structure relevant datasets, particularly concerning big cat populations, and formulate an implementation roadmap. With technical assistance from the ESCAP IT team, the prototype platform is expected to be launched on the NEASPEC website in the third or fourth quarter of 2026. The platform aims

to serve as a regional hub for data exchange, collaborative research, and multi-stakeholder engagement in biodiversity conservation. The conceptual framework and a sample platform diagram of the information-sharing platform are provided in Annex V.

Knowledge dissemination: Outreach activities

17. A synthesis report on the project “Transboundary Cooperation on the Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards, and Snow Leopards in North-East Asia” has been developed under a consultancy contract with Ms. Anoushka Ali. The report consolidates major findings and outcomes of the project regarding species populations, habitat conditions, and movement patterns, with the aim of supporting evidence-based decision-making and facilitating knowledge exchange among relevant stakeholders. The report will be made publicly available upon finalization. The draft synthesis report is included in Annex VI.

IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

18. The Meeting may wish to request member States to:
- (a) Provide views on the ongoing activities related to migratory birds and their habitats, including the progress of the project “Connectivity Conservation for Habitats of Flagship Migratory Birds in North-East Asia”;
 - (b) Review and provide feedback on the ongoing activities pertinent to the conservation of big feline species, including the draft synthesis report of the project “Transboundary Cooperation on the Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards, and Snow Leopards in North-East Asia” (Annex VI) and the establishment of a North-East Asia Network on Big Cats; and
 - (c) Review and approve the proposed activity plan for 2026 (Annex VII).

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