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2nd Session of the Meeting of Parties

Bonn, Germany, 1-3 July 1998

Resolution No. 4

Transboundary Programme: Habitat Proposals

The Meeting of the Parties

Recalling the Resolution agreed at its first session (18-20 July 1995) on *the Implementation of the Conservation and Management Plan* (Annex K page 45 of the report of the meeting);

Recalling also, under Priorities 10, 11 and 12 of that Resolution, that important roosts should be identified, the conservation of underground habitats important to bats should be given special attention, and that nationally-agreed guidelines for sites meriting protection should be established and reviewed periodically;

Noting that, in implementing its work programme, the Advisory Committee decided to include the conservation of important habitats or habitat-types within its considerations on the development of a transboundary programme for bat conservation;

Noting also the work being carried out in the framework of the Pan-European Biological and landscape Diversity Strategy, in particular towards the establishment of the Pan-European Ecological Network (Action Theme 1) and under the European Action Programme for Threatened Species (Action Theme 11);

Noting further the work being carried out in the framework of the European Habitats Directive, in particular the establishment of the Natura 2000 network and in the framework of the Bern Convention, in particular the establishment of the Emerald network;

Recognising that, according to the letter of Annex K, Priorities 10, 11 and 12, the Parties themselves were charged, on a national basis, with the development of measures to protect important habitats;

Recognising also, however, that the successful protection of important habitats of a similar type would benefit from the application of consistent standards throughout the Agreement area;

Decides that the following two habitat types should be the subject of specific national research in relation to the conservation of European bats: underground sites and forests;

Decides that the contracting parties should endeavour to provide data on sites specified in annex I and II, as well as an assessment of sites with problems caused by man, by the middle of 2000 to the Secretariat.

Directs the Secretariat to commission an assessment of all national data, where available, for consideration by the Advisory Committee and submission to the third session of the Meeting of Parties.

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Transboundary Programme for Bat Conservation

Element 2: Bats Habitats

Underground Habitats

Proposal for an international project on the development of a list of European underground habitats of significance to bat populations, and standard measures for ensuring the maintenance of such populations at a healthy and stable level.

1. Aims

Underground habitats (including caves, mines, fortifications and tunnels) play a vital role in the life-cycle of many European Microchiroptera species, which use them as hibernation, summer and transitional roost-sites including during migration. Particularly in the latter case, it is often difficult to establish the importance of sites, owing to the transitory nature of their occupation. However, such sites may often be key to the survival of a species in a particular region of the continent. The significance and threats to such sites have been highlighted by almost all contributors to an action plan on world Microchiroptera in preparation by IUCN.

Activities such as speleology, mine closure and public interest in underground habitats can have a disastrous effect on bat fauna in this habitat type. Further, little is known in general terms about the nature of many bat-populations which use underground habitats. For this reason, data-collection should be co-ordinated to determine the distribution and numbers of underground-habitat-using bat populations, and the degree of threat posed by human activity and natural site-loss. Criteria for the definition of significant bat-populations should be developed to judge how important particular underground habitats are when considering conservation measures. The conservation measures themselves should also be considered, and comparative studies carried out to determine the specific measures most appropriate for particular sites or site-types (for example grilling, fencing, seasonal restriction of access) or bat species. The project would also assess measures taken for the enhancement of existing sites and the creation of new sites.

Types of underground habitat should also be identified, and the species which use particular sites identified in order to develop site-specific guidelines which correspond to the individual needs of certain species.

The Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe sets out the framework for addressing the comprehensive conservation of bats. Bat conservation needs to relate itself to all aspects of man's activities which affect bats' lives, including commercial mineral extraction and leisure practices.

This collaborative project involving all the Agreement's Parties should collate available information about bats in underground habitats and methods of protecting them, and,

eventually, lead to the development of an international list of underground habitats of importance to bat-populations. It would identify key sites in need of protection, and provide guidelines on effective site-protection.

2. Activities

National activities:

First step: *data collection*

collate data where available on sites:

- national databases in each Party
- categorise sites according to nature of site and bat species
- occurrence and abundance of bat species in underground habitats
- status of species
- population trends
- list human uses of site (if any)
- identify conservation/protected status of sites
- category of significance (eg national, international, local etc.)

Second step: *identify problems created by man (organisation and assessment of data)*

1. assessment of conservation problems of bats in underground habitats through eg.
 - mineral extraction
 - leisure use
 - closure (eg for public safety)
 - natural events
 - economic use (including human/animals shelter)
2. assessment of measures for protection: by restriction of use/access
by physical means
3. identify problems caused by protection measures
4. examine effectiveness of conservation-enhancement measures
5. assessment of constraints on other interested parties

The assessment should include the following:

Compilation and evaluation

- a) Compilation of data:
 - status and trends of bats in European underground habitats
 - conservation actions for bats in underground habitats
- b) Evaluation:
 - perspectives of national and international research and conservation programmes on bats in underground habitats
 - identification of scale of bat-conservation problems caused by certain human practices in certain regions or habitat-types
 - identification of conservation priorities
 - development of criteria for identification of key sites

Report, including recommendations and guidelines

- definition of significant bat-populations as far as European underground habitats are concerned
- categorisation of underground habitat-types

- list of key sites and their conservation/protected status
- list of key sites needing protection and identification of sources to help where required
- guidelines for measures to protect bat-populations in underground habitats, according to habitat-type and species of bat, including measures for enhancement
- guidelines for minimising impact of other uses of important underground habitats
- priorities for research projects on bats in underground habitats

Before the third session of the Meeting of Parties, the Advisory Committee may be charged with considering the list of underground habitats of importance to bats, and eventually developing a set of guidelines for their management and protection.

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Transboundary Programme for Bat Conservation

Element 2: Bats Habitats

Forests

Proposal for an international project on the development of guidelines on bat-friendly forestry practices in Europe.

1. Aims

Forestry practices and forest bat fauna vary greatly in different parts of Europe. Many bat-species are dependent on forests as their living areas; among these are a number of highly migratory species such as the Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*) and Nathusius's pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus nathusii*). The significance and threats to bats of forest loss or unsympathetic management through loss of roosting and foraging opportunity have been highlighted by almost all contributors to an action plan on world Microchiroptera in preparation by IUCN.

The Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe sets out the framework for addressing the comprehensive conservation of bats. Bat conservation needs to relate itself to all aspects of man's activities which affect bats' lives, including forestry practices. Surveys carried out on a nation-by-nation basis should assess the implications to bats of current forestry practices, including deforestation, afforestation, reforestation, management, design, age structure and species composition. The project should also investigate the value of conservation initiatives of a general nature (eg management practices, veteran-tree initiatives - such as in Poland, the United Kingdom and Canada - habitat enhancement) and specifically for bats (eg bat boxes, habitat enhancement and creation), and also the distribution and continuity of forest patches (the network). This can then be translated into policy change or proposed action to be carried out by the national forestry industry. A collaborative project of the Agreement's Parties should collate present knowledge and develop general principles and recommendations for the European region, both in terms of Parties and participating Non-Party Range-States, to incorporate in their plans for a sustainable approach to forestry, having regard to the needs of the bat fauna which are present in, or dependent upon, their forests.

2. Activities

National activities

First step: *Data collection*

- a) Bats in forests (Bat Agreement national reports):
 - occurrence and abundance of bat species in forest habitats
 - status of species
 - population trends
 - special features of ecology of bats in forests

- b) Conservation:
 - threats to bats in forests

- national projects on the conservation of bats in forests
- wider conservation initiatives that benefit bats
- valid protected areas, sites and networks (e.g. Natura 2000, EECONET, Emerald Network)
- consideration of bats in forestry practices
- literary search including outside Europe

Second step: *Assessment (organisation and assessment of data)*

- problems
- constraints of forestry industry
- current measures for conservation (including of bats)
- mitigation opportunities
- assessment and report on value of bat boxes

The results, where available, of the first two steps should be included in the national implementation reports for consideration by the Parties at their third meeting.

International activities

These activities should be pursued following consideration by the Meeting of Parties at its third session.

Third step: *Compilation and evaluation*

- a) Compilation of data:
 - status and trends of bats in European forests
 - conservation actions for bats in forests
- b) Evaluation:
 - perspectives of national and international research and conservation programmes on bats in forests, with special reference to ongoing Bat Agreement activities
 - identification of bat-conservation problems caused by certain forestry practices in certain regions or habitats
 - identification of conservation priorities

Fourth step: *Report, including recommendations and guidelines*

- guidelines for the consideration of bat conservation in forestry practices in Europe
- guidelines for protected areas as forest habitats of bats
- priorities and guidelines for research projects on bats in forests and their interrelationship with forestry practice
- identification of key areas for forestry enhancement

Next steps:

Following the third session of the Meeting of Parties, the Advisory Committee may be charged with considering the guidelines and recommendations, and passing them through their governments to national agencies responsible for regulating forestry practice for comment and eventual adoption.