



Document 15

Enhancing EAAFP's Strategic Engagement with Global Environment Facility

Submitted by EAAFP Secretariat

Summary

This report is submitted by the EAAFP Secretariat to the 12th Meeting of Partners to the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership. It presents an analysis of EAAFP's past and current engagement with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) projects, identifies key challenges, and highlights the potential opportunities for enhanced collaboration under GEF-9. The report outlines strategic recommendations aimed at strengthening EAAFP's role in flyway-scale GEF conservation projects, securing better alignment with GEF funding mechanisms, and ensuring a more coordinated approach to the protection of migratory waterbirds and their critical habitats across the Flyway.

Partners are invited to read the report and take note of the recommendations contained in the report.

Background

1. Recent assessments indicate significant declines in migratory waterbird populations globally, and a particularly rapid deterioration within the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF). The first comprehensive Conservation Status Review (CSR1) (2022) for the EAAF documents numerous declining waterbird populations and maps critical population losses across the Flyway. The report evaluated 276 migratory waterbird populations and found that 16 % of these belong to globally threatened species, with a further 12 % categorized as Near Threatened, signaling pronounced vulnerability throughout the EAAF. Given these alarming trends, the urgent need for additional and sustained conservation funding and initiatives to protect migratory waterbirds within the Flyway has become even more critical.
2. Over the past decades, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has supported a limited number of projects dedicated to the conservation of migratory birds. During GEF-3 cycle, the regional project *Development of a Wetland Site and Flyway Network for Conservation of the Siberian Crane and*

Other Migratory Waterbirds in Asia was implemented to conserve the network of critical wetlands needed for survival of the Siberian Cranes, other threatened cranes, and numerous water birds that form an important resource for local populations.

3. The limitation arises from that, while the GEF serves as a financial mechanism for conventions like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), it does not directly support the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands or the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). This has created challenges for EAAFP Partners in developing GEF-funded projects that are specifically focused on the Flyway. This limitation highlights the need for closer engagement between EAAFP and GEF, ensuring more effective alignment and funding for flyway-scale projects.
4. Secretariat welcomes the approval of GEF-8 Flyway projects in People's Republic of China and the Philippines namely; *Strengthening the Protected Area Network for Migratory Bird Conservation along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway in China* by UNDP, and the *Scaling-up conservation and sustainable management of priority wetlands of the East-Asian Australasian Flyway in the Philippines (PHIL FLYWAY)* project by Asian Development Bank. The Secretariat has been providing in-kind contributions to these projects and highly values the continued collaboration with UNDP and ADB during the implementation phase.
5. Nevertheless, the lack of institutional link between EAAFP and GEF agencies limits our ability to directly engage in the project planning process, and this lack of connection hinders EAAFP's capacity to ensure that such projects align with the EAAFP Strategic Plan, especially in terms of ensuring the connectivity of Flyway Network Sites beyond individual national projects. This disconnect underscores the need for an institutional linkage between EAAFP and GEF, allowing for direct participation in project development and ensuring that EAAFP's flyway-scale approach is incorporated.
6. Past and ongoing GEF projects demonstrate the potential for additional GEF-supported initiatives in EAAF. Building on the lessons learned from these projects and acknowledging the challenges EAAFP faces in engaging with GEF programming dialogues, the Secretariat looks forward to enhancing its strategic engagement with GEF. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that future flyway-scale projects incorporate ecological, social, and institutional connectivity of the Flyway Network Sites in their design.

EAAFP's proposed engagement in GEF-9 Programming Direction

7. The Secretariat welcomes the inclusion of "Flyways" in the *Draft GEF-9 Strategic Positioning and Programming Directions* under the Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy and Associated Programming. The BD Strategy envisions a programmatic approach dedicated to flyways, which will support integrated landscape/seascape approaches across multiple geographies in a coherent and

coordinated manner. The Strategy, if adopted, anticipates national projects through STAR resources and also possible separate resources that will support a global and/or regional coordination project(s). The program will work in partnership with international organizations, governments, the private sector, and IPLCs, taking an integrated approach that combines policy, planning and site-based measures. It will support several KMGBF targets (including 1, 3, 4, 8 and 9) with complementary contributions to the CMS and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

8. The Secretariat also acknowledges the potential value addition by the GEF-9's Global Wildlife for Development Integrated Programme (GW IP), which aims to conserve wildlife and wildlife landscapes by addressing the drivers of wildlife loss and promoting human-wildlife coexistence. Achieving this requires a transboundary approach, with global coordination and engagement to align and integrate diverse actors and initiatives. From the EAAFP's perspective, the GW IP offers a valuable opportunity to enhance flyway-scale conservation efforts, particularly in alignment with EAAFP's Strategic Plan, specifically KRA 5.4, which focuses on developing measures to reduce and eliminate illegal hunting, take, and trade of migratory waterbirds.
9. Developing a GEF-supported Flyway project is a strategic opportunity to significantly advance the EAAFP Strategic Plan and also to contribute to several targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), including Targets 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, and 12. Additionally, it will promote deeper collaboration and information sharing across Flyway initiatives, ensuring that the EAAFP's commitment to achieving sustainable and coordinated conservation outcomes is effectively realized.

Strengthening Cooperation with Flyway-related Conventions

10. Secretariat welcomes the recognition of the importance of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway in contributing to achieving other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, such as the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Convention on Wetlands, for the advancement of the conservation of migratory waterbirds.
11. With the CMS, the GEF CEO's statement at CMS COP14 highlights the importance of transboundary conservation and the need for integrated, cross-sectoral collaboration, particularly in the face of climate change. GEF's focus on landscape-scale conservation and its support for critical migratory species habitats, such as wetlands and Ramsar sites, aligns with EAAFP's goals. By contributing to ecosystem connectivity and climate resilience, EAAFP's focus on connecting Flyway Network Sites can significantly support GEF's strategic objectives and global biodiversity goals. The CEO's emphasis on collaboration across biodiversity-related conventions underscores the need to engage all relevant stakeholders, positioning EAAFP as a key player in the GEF-9's flyway-related programming.

12. The recent Ramsar COP15 Resolution (COP15 Doc.23.16 Rev.1) on *Strengthening national actions for the conservation and restoration of waterbird flyways and critical sites* invited Contracting Parties and other states to join migratory waterbird conservation initiatives at the national level, such as the East Asian–Australasian Flyway, and the CMS; develop a national action plan for the conservation and restoration of migratory waterbird flyways; support and engage with flyway initiatives relevant to their geography; and exchange best practices, conservation evidence, and experiences in enhancing national actions.
13. EAAFP, while not a formal treaty, has a membership of national governments, inter-governmental organizations, including the CBD, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and CMS. This structured partnership plays a vital role in flyway-based conservation, which aligns closely with GEF's biodiversity and climate objectives. Given EAAFP's expertise in ecological connectivity, habitat conservation, and transboundary collaboration, EAAFP is well-positioned to contribute meaningfully to the GEF-9 strategic dialogue on Flyways.
14. Recognizing EAAFP as a key stakeholder will ensure that flyway considerations are integrated into broader global conservation efforts, enhancing the impact and effectiveness of GEF-funded projects. This collaboration will strengthen the coordination of migratory species protection across regions and contribute to achieving GEF's strategic goals.
15. With the GEF-9 replenishment discussions continuing into mid-2026, the EAAFP Secretariat would like to submit a paper to MOP12 to articulate our recommendations. The Secretariat welcomes Partners' input and support.
16. **Based on the analysis, the EAAFP Secretariat recommends:**
 - a. **Support for Flyway Inclusion in GEF-9 Programming**

Encourages country Partners, through their GEF Council members, to advocate for the inclusion of a Flyway component in the final version of the GEF-9 Programming Directions to ensure that migratory waterbird conservation is adequately prioritized.
 - b. **Enhanced Dialogue with GEF and CBD National Focal Points**

Encourages EAAFP National Focal Points to seek opportunities to engage with the National Focal Points of the CBD and GEF. This engagement should focus on prioritizing the conservation needs of migratory waterbirds and their habitats, ensuring alignment with the EAAFP Strategic Plan 2019-2028 in the decision-making processes for GEF funding at both national and regional levels.
 - c. **Strengthening Cooperation with CBD, CMS, and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**

Further encourages EAAFP to work with CBD, CMS, and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Partners to strengthen collaboration in the development and implementation of flyway initiatives under the relevant GEF-9 Biodiversity Focal Areas and the Global Wildlife Program Integrated Programmes.

d. Development of Flyway-focused GEF Projects

Invites GEF agencies to collaborate with EAAFP in the development of GEF projects that focus on Flyway conservation, specifically addressing the issues identified in the EAA Flyway.

e. Alignment with EAAFP Strategic Plan in NBSAPs

Encourages country Partners to align their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with the EAAFP Strategic Plan 2019-2028, prioritizing flyway conservation to fully benefit from relevant GEF funding opportunities.

f. Engagement with GEF at All Levels

Requests the Secretariat to engage with GEF and its agencies at all appropriate levels to pursue the implementation of these recommendations and ensure that the EAAFP's strategic objectives are well-integrated into GEF-supported projects.

g. Recognition of EAAFP as a Key Partner

Encourages all EAAFP Partners to recognize the EAAFP as the principal partner in the development of GEF projects and Integrated Programmes focused on the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway.