

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats



Standing Committee

Recommendation No. 97 (2002) on the conservation of the Bald ibis (*Geronticus eremita*) and the tourism development project in Tifnit (Souss Massa, Morocco)

(adopted by the Standing Committee on 5 December 2002)

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention, which are to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats;

Recalling that Article 1, paragraph 2, of the Convention requires Parties to give particular emphasis to species which are endangered and vulnerable, including migratory species;

Referring to the other provisions of the Convention on the protection of habitats and the conservation of species;

Given that the bald ibis belongs to the family of threskiornithidae, all the species of which are included in Appendix II of the Convention and that it is also one of the most endangered bird species in the world, and that its only viable population in the wild is dependent on the healthy ecological state of this region;

Recalling its own recommendations on the conservation of birds, particularly Recommendation n° 60 (1997) of the Standing Committee;

Taking into account the report by Mr Joan Mayol, drawn up after his on-site visit [document T-PVS/Files (2002) 6];

Referring to the work carried out in the context of the Pan-European Strategy for Biological and Landscape Diversity in the area of tourism and, more specifically, to Committee of Ministers Recommendation n° R (95) 10 on a sustainable tourist development policy in protected areas;

Recognising that the Souss Massa National Park and the Tamri region are home to the last sanctuary of the world's only population of the bald ibis;

Noting, in addition, that the park represents a migratory stopping-off point of international importance for thousands of waterfowl;

Emphasising Morocco's international responsibility in the task of conserving this species, but also that of other States involved in development projects on the Moroccan territory;

Noting the exemplary role played by BirdLife International in terms of advice and assistance, a true example of partnership between a non-governmental organisation and a public institution;

Given the major risks that the Club Méditerranée or any similar project inevitably poses for the conservation of the bald ibis, the natural biotopes and the Souss Massa National Park;

Considering that such a project is in contradiction with the provisions of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, to which the Kingdom of Morocco is a Contracting Party (articles 1.2, 2, 3.2, 4.2, 6.b and 6.c);

Conscious of the concerns for local development, but nevertheless considering that any tourism development, however legitimate, will only harm the local natural heritage;

Desirous to avoid further depletion of biological diversity through urgent action to save an endangered species,

Recommends that the Government of Morocco:

1. oppose any project of touristic establishment that would be likely to threaten territories that are vital to the bald ibis and to authorise only development that is adapted to the park's environmental constraints and conservation objectives;
2. take steps to ensure that the SONABA plot of land is restored to its former owner, namely the Department of Water and Forestry, and designated for conservation of nature and of the bald ibis. If an economic arrangement proves essential for this purpose, the resources must be found to implement this project as rapidly as possible inside the country, or through international fundings;
3. accord the highest priority to re-establishment of the Bald ibis, using all possible measures to increase the wild populations of this species, which is in an extremely critical situation, and to pursue research into the species with the assistance of the other Contracting Parties concerned;
4. consider the ibis - and the remainder of the local or reintroduced fauna - and the argan forest as an opportunity rather than a constraint, which could play an enormous role as an attraction for nature tourism. A development project based around the park, and not inside it, would be a good compromise between economic factors and conservation;
5. end the illegal occupation of the coast through cave conversions, and evacuate and demolish all illegal constructions, since they represent an unjustifiable occupation of the coastal zone, threatening areas that are vital for the ibis and preventing the possibility of the species' expansion; put an end to other activities that are incompatible with the national park's objective and that have - or are likely to have - an impact on the bald ibis (military shooting range, circulation of cars along the cliff, paragliding, intensive chicken farm);
6. increase the resources, whether legal, economic and human, designated for the conservation, management and monitoring of the park, which are inadequate if this unique site is to fulfil its potential for conservation and sustainable development; develop nature tourism and exploration of the rural heritage which can be a source of income for the local population;
7. extend protection to the Tamri area, situated outside the park, which houses a nesting site for the bald ibis;
8. conduct awareness campaigns aimed at the local population, tourists, tour operators and investors, so as to inform them of the value of the local natural heritage;

Recommends other Contracting Parties to provide their financial and technical support to the implementation of the measures proposed in the recommendation;

Invites the international financial bodies to participate in the funding of some of the actions proposed.