

**INTERNATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR
THE IMPERIAL EAGLE (*Aquila heliaca*)**



Compiled by:

BORJA HEREDIA (BirdLife International, U.K.)

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Timetable

Workshop: December 1993 - Királyrét, Hungary
First draft: April 1994
This version: February 1996

Reviews

The action plan should be reviewed and updated every four years. An emergency review will be undertaken if sudden major environmental changes, liable to affect the population, occur within the species' range.

Geographical scope

This action plan is primarily targeted at those European countries where the Imperial Eagle breeds or occurs on migration or in winter. However, given the significance of the Middle East for migration and/or wintering, and the conservation problems which affect migratory birds of prey in that region, the geographical scope of the action plan was extended to include the Middle East as well. The action plan needs active implementation in: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Oman, Romania, Russia (European part), Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Turkey, Ukraine, Yemen and Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

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SUMMARY

The Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* is classified as Vulnerable at the global level (Collar *et al.* 1994) and Endangered at the European level (Tucker and Heath 1994). In Europe it occurs in the Carpathian mountains and basin, the southern and eastern Balkan peninsula, the hills and steppes of south-east Ukraine and south Russia, and the Caucasus mountains. Total numbers are estimated at 363–604 pairs.

Threats and limiting factors

- * **Habitat alterations caused by forestry operations - critical**
- * **Shooting and human disturbance - high**
- * **Poisoning - medium, potentially high**
- * **Nest-robbing and illegal trade - high**
- * **Shortage of key prey species - medium**
- * **Collision with, and electrocution by powerlines - unknown, potentially high**

Conservation priorities

- * **Forestry policies compatible with the conservation of the species - high**
- * **Legal protection for the species and key sites - high**
- * **Designate protected areas - high**
- * **Implementation of international conventions and treaties - high**
- * **Appropriate habitat management - high**
- * **Increase availability of key prey species particularly suslik - high**
- * **Prevent mortality due to nest robbing, illegal trade and poisoning - high**
- * **Reduce mortality from powerlines - high**
- * **National surveys to identify breeding sites and monitor of key sites - high**
- * **Locate wintering areas and migration routes - high**

INTRODUCTION

The Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* is a migratory species classed as Vulnerable at the world level (Collar *et al.* 1994) and Endangered at a European level (Tucker and Heath 1994). It is listed as Rare in the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals* (Groombridge 1993) and is also included in Annex I of the EU Wild Birds Directive, in Appendix I of CITES and in Appendix II of both the Bern and Bonn Conventions.

In Europe it has suffered a rapid decline in recent decades and is now very rare or extinct in many areas. It is known to be increasing only in Hungary and Slovakia, thanks to specific conservation programmes undertaken in those countries.

In December 1993 the third meeting of the Eastern Imperial Eagle Working Group took place in Királyrét (Hungary), hosted by the Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society (MME) and organised by MME and BirdLife International. Representatives from Bulgaria, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia were present. The Imperial Eagle's situation was thoroughly discussed and the most important actions to safeguard its future in Europe were outlined.

This action plan relies mainly on the information gathered during that meeting, but also on literature sources and the comments of other experts consulted. It intends to provide a framework of action for statutory agencies, conservation organisations and individuals responsible for, or interested in, the conservation of the species.

PART 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Distribution and population

The Imperial Eagle is sparsely distributed from central, south-east and eastern Europe east to Lake Baikal in Russia. In Europe it occurs as a breeding species in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine. Population figures for each of these countries have been gathered from several presentations during the workshop at Királyrét and from the Dispersed Species Project of BirdLife International (Table 1).

The adult eagles are partially migratory, with some birds moving south or south-east, though in severe winters Europe may be totally vacated. The young are fully migratory and winter in Egypt, Greece, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey and Yemen (Cramp and Simmons 1980, Evans 1994).

Table 1. Breeding population of the Imperial Eagle in Europe, based on data gathered during the workshop carried out in Hungary in December 1993. The figure for Russia is from Galushin (1995).

	No. of pairs
Armenia	8–10
Azerbaijan	35–40
Bulgaria	20–25
Croatia	1–2
Cyprus	2–4
Georgia	8–11
Greece	0–2
Hungary	34–36
FYR Macedonia	4–6
Moldova	3–3
Romania	10–20
Russia	150–300
Slovakia	30–35
Turkey	10–50
Ukraine	40–50
Yugoslavia	8–10
Total	363–604

In the Middle East the species occurs widely on passage and in winter. The migrant/wintering population has been estimated at 500–1,000 birds between October and March. During winter it occurs regularly at 79 sites (Table 2), numbers at each varying from one to c.15 birds. In the marshes of southern Iraq the total wintering population probably exceeds 100 (Evans 1994, R. F. Porter *in litt.* 1994).

Table 2. Occurrence of the Imperial Eagle in Middle Eastern countries in winter. Based on Evans (1994).

	No. of sites
Iran	28
Iraq	10
Israel	7
Jordan	9
Kuwait	3
Lebanon	1
Oman	7
Saudi Arabia	5
Yemen	9
Total	79

Some important migration bottlenecks are in Burgas (Bulgaria), north-east Turkey, the eastern shore of the Mediterranean (Syria, Lebanon, Israel) and Elat (Israel). The highest concentration of passage birds is over Elat where up to 90 have been recorded on migration in spring.

Life history

* **Taxonomic status**

The Imperial Eagle was formerly considered a species comprising two races: *adalberti* in the Iberian peninsula and *heliaca* in central/eastern Europe and Asia. In recent years evidence has been put forward to support their separation as distinct species (Hiraldo *et al.* 1976, González *et al.* 1989), and cytochrome b sequences endorse this (Wink and Seibold 1994).. This plan deals only with *A. heliaca*, and since the Spanish Imperial Eagle *A. adalberti* is also globally-threatened, there is an action plan for this species in the same series.

* **Breeding**

The Imperial Eagle builds a large stick nest on the tops of trees; these may be solitary or in shelterbelts in flat landscapes, or in deciduous or coniferous forests; very occasionally nests are built on electricity pylons. The clutch is completed in late March or early April and usually consists of 2–3 eggs; breeding success is around 1.5 young per successful pair, but can vary a great deal depending on food availability. The young remain with their parents throughout the summer and then migrate. Adult plumage is acquired at 5–6 years old but pairs with both birds in immature plumage have successfully reared young. Birds will accept purpose-built artificial nest structures. Captive breeding has been achieved in France since 1986.

* **Feeding**

The diet is largely mammals, mainly suslik *Citellus citellus*, hamster *Cricetus cricetus* and hare *Lepus*, but also small rodents (*Microtus*, *Apodemus*), and carrion. Birds comprise 15–25% of the diet and include Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*, Partridge *Perdix perdix*, domestic chicken and passerines (Simeonov and Petrov 1980). Imperial Eagles in the Caucasus feed largely on rodents, corvids, lizards and carrion (Abuladze in prep.).

* **Habitat requirements**

The Imperial Eagle is predominantly a lowland species but has been pushed to higher altitudes by persecution. In central and eastern Europe the breeding habitat consists of forests in mountains, hills and along rivers, at an altitude of up to 1,000 m, but also steppes, open landscapes and agricultural areas (Petrov *et al.* in prep.). In the Caucasus it occurs in lowland and riverine forests, semi-deserts and old forests (Abuladze in prep.). It hunts in open areas and wetlands. A variety of habitats is used during migration, though birds seem to prefer wetlands for wintering.

Threats and limiting factors

* **Habitat alterations caused by forestry**

Forestry operations affecting breeding areas are possibly the most important threat. These consist of: cutting of the forest for reforestation with alien species; cutting of large, old trees in forest and along field edges; disturbance by logging during the breeding season; and destruction of lowland forest. In Greece, old low-altitude forests have been intensively exploited, and some have been turned into pine plantations (Hallmann 1985). An important side effect of forestry is the increased human disturbance in previously isolated areas due to the construction of tracks.

Importance: critical

* **Human disturbance**

The Imperial Eagle is a species sensitive to human activities in its nesting area. Disturbance, both intentional and unintentional, is a major cause of breeding failure.

Importance: high

* **Nest robbing and illegal trade**

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 has led to a decline of the general control of the laws protecting wildlife; control by customs has relaxed considerably and there is a general lack of enforcement of the CITES regulations (Flint and Sorokin 1992). In 1992, 12 Imperial Eagles from Kazakhstan/Azerbaijan were confiscated by customs officers in Germany and sent to Hungary, where they were successfully released in 1993. A further 11 birds are still held in Slovakia awaiting a destination, and there are at least two further consignments (of two and four birds) that have gone to Germany or Belgium. The methods used for smuggling birds of prey out of the former USSR are clearly very efficient and there are good grounds for believing that the extent of trapping and smuggling will increase further in the near future if no immediate national and international actions are taken to prevent this. Many of the birds taken from the wild are brought into zoos where they are registered as 'legal' and then put on the market as captive-bred (Abuladze and Shergalin in prep.). Unsuccessful fledglings and other young birds are sometimes taken and kept in captivity with no specific objective (P. Iankov *in litt.* 1994).

Importance: high

*

Shooting

Persecution is still a problem in Romania and Greece. After habitat destruction, shooting is considered the second most important threat to birds of prey in Greece, contributing substantially to the decline of the Imperial Eagle (Hallmann 1985). Shooting of birds of prey on migration is common practice in north-east Turkey, Lebanon and Syria (Magnin 1988, Baumgart 1991), and an Imperial Eagle carrying a satellite transmitter was shot in Saudi Arabia in 1993 (B.-U. Meyburg pers. comm. 1993). The military in the Middle East often use birds of prey for target practice (R. F. Porter verbally 1995). There are also instances of shooting in Georgia and Azerbaijan, and the problem of expatriate hunters shooting indiscriminately in east European countries is increasingly reported.

Importance: high

*

Poisoning

This problem involves secondary or unintentional ingestion of poisons which are being used for the control of other species. Poisoning for wolves is one of the reasons for the decline of the Imperial Eagle in eastern Europe and Greece. The use of strychnine was regular in the Caucasian Republics but this has now ceased due to social and economic problems. In Bulgaria luminal was officially used in 1993 against wolves by the Committee for Forestry but this was stopped due to actions by the Ministry of Environment and NGOs. Poisoning is also a problem in the Middle East, where poison is used on rubbish-tips to control crows, foxes, jackals, dogs, rats, etc.

Importance: medium, potentially high

*

Shortage of key prey species

The Imperial Eagle is a specialised predator, tending to concentrate on one or a few prey items such as, in eastern Europe, the suslik. Susliks have virtually disappeared from Hungary due to overhunting and habitat loss. The removal of this food source affects the Imperial Eagle by substantially decreasing its productivity and increasing the likelihood of sibling aggression.

Importance: medium

*

Trapping

The capture of full-grown Imperial Eagles in Europe appears always to be an incidental result of mammal trapping, usually by the exposed bait method; it is generally sporadic and of local significance. Imperial Eagles are known to have been caught in mammal leg-hold traps only in the Caucasus, where trapping is widespread – though it is likely that similar incidents do happen occasionally in other countries. Trapping is also a problem in the Middle East, and in Syria large numbers of birds of prey, including Imperial Eagles, are trapped and sold in markets around Damascus (R. F. Porter *in litt.* 1994).

Importance: low

- * **Collision with, and electrocution by powerlines**
Collision with powerlines is only occasional but electrocution can be a very important factor. In the case of the Spanish Imperial Eagle it proved to be the main source of mortality of young birds during dispersion. With the Imperial Eagle some instances are known from Georgia, but more research is needed to clarify its importance here and elsewhere.
Importance: unknown, potentially high

Conservation status and recent conservation measures

- * **Armenia**
Imperial Eagle is included in the Armenian Red Data Book of 1987. There are only a few breeding records from the north of the country, near the border with Georgia and Azerbaijan. Information on the species is very sparse (A. Abuladze pers. comm. 1993). The country is suffering from armed conflict.
- * **Azerbaijan**
The species is legally protected but not included in the Red Data Book. Most of the population is in the west near the border with Georgia, along the lowland forests of the Kura river. At least two pairs are included in a protected area, the Karaijaz Game Reserve (A. Abuladze pers. comm. 1993, Abuladze in prep.). The country is suffering from armed conflict.
- * **Bulgaria**
The species is protected by the Law for the Conservation of Nature of 1962 and is listed as Endangered in the Red Data Book of 1985. It occurs in mountains, hills and agricultural areas. The largest part of the population (56%) lies along the middle course of the Tundzha river including the Strandzha mountains. Next in importance is the Rhodope mountains (22%), with the remainder occupying the area between the Sredna Gora mountains and the fore-Balkan range (Petrov *et al.* in prep.). One of the known breeding pairs is within a protected area, Sashtinska Sredna Gora mountain. The Strandzha Mountains were designated as a National Park (116,000 ha) in 1995. The main limiting factors are loss of breeding and feeding habitat, the felling of old solitary trees in the plains, forestry, poaching, nest-robbing and human disturbance (Petrov and Iankov 1993).

The Imperial Eagle is currently the main target of a raptor conservation programme in the Eastern Rhodopes being carried out by BSPB. The population is monitored, breeding success assessed and supplementary feeding provided. This is organised mainly for vultures, but is also used by Imperial Eagles. There are proposals for a new protected area (including the critical areas for the species) in preparation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment. There is no specific conservation programme or regular monitoring for the remainder of the population.

*

Croatia

Imperial Eagles are protected under the Croatian Law of Nature Protection of 1994: any disturbance, persecution, killing and trade are strictly prohibited. Present status is unknown, but there is a possibility that some pairs still nest in eastern Slavonia (around Ilok) and in Spa_va forests; none of these areas is covered by the IBA network. There have been recent observations in Kopacki rit (IBA 014) and eastern Slavonia (Dugo Cerje and Ilok) during migration and in winter. The species has not been monitored because of the armed conflict affecting Croatia for much of the last few years.

*

Cyprus

The Imperial Eagle was formerly common but is now a very scarce resident in the Troodos range, where it usually breeds on Aleppo pine *Pinus halepensis*. It migrates regularly over Cyprus (Flint and Stewart 1992).

*

Georgia

The species is legally protected and is listed as Endangered in the Georgian Red Data Book of 1982. It occurs in the south-east of the country, in lowland forest along the Kura, Alazani, Iori and Khrami rivers; on the Iori plateau; and in the eastern slopes of the Trialeti range in the Caspian Sea catchment area. As a wintering species it occurs in the semi-desert zone and in the extreme south-east. Some pairs are covered by protected areas in Gardabani and Chachuna Game Reserves and a few birds winter in Vashlovani Reserve. The main limiting factors are destruction of nesting habitat, human disturbance, predation of clutches by corvids, shooting, electrocution and poisoning (Abuladze in prep.). Between 1981 and 1991 the Imperial Eagle was monitored regularly by biologists of the Institute of Zoology of Georgia, as part of a broader programme; this has now stopped because of the armed conflict which the country is suffering.

*

Greece

Imperial Eagle is legally protected and classified as Endangered in the Greek Red Data Book. In the past it has bred in single trees or remnant riparian woods of deltas (Axios, Evros). It is now virtually extinct but may breed occasionally in Evros, Thessaly and on the border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The decline is attributed to the cutting of old forests for reforestation, incidental poisoning linked to the poisoning of wolves, and shooting (B. Hallmann pers. comm. 1993).

*

Hungary

The species is in the highest category of legal protection and also in the Hungarian Red Data Book. The population lies mainly in the mountain areas along the border with Slovakia, although in recent years a few pairs have become established on the plain. It occurs in the following Important Bird Areas: 004 Börzsöny (Landscape Protection Reserve), 006 Vértes (Landscape Protection Reserve), 012 Zemplén (Landscape Protection Reserve), 013 Bükk (National Park), 028 Aggtelek (National Park), 029 Gerecse (Landscape Protection Reserve), 030 Mátra (Landscape Protection Reserve) (Grimmett and Jones 1989). The proportion within protected areas is reasonably good although some areas deserve stricter protection. Main conservation

problems include the privatisation of land, hunting and game management, human disturbance, and the intensification of agriculture. The population is very well monitored by the Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society (MME), and conservation action undertaken includes nest surveillance, suslik reintroduction and restocking, construction of artificial nests, and the reintroduction of confiscated birds (Haraszthy *et al.* in prep.).

* **Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

Breeding continues, but numbers have decreased considerably, and breeding no longer occurs in the north and east (Vasic *et al.* 1985). At least two pairs nest on electricity pylons (I. Ham pers. comm. 1993).

* **Moldova**

There are only very small numbers and the species is included in the Red Data Book. It is present in the Kapriyanovsko–Lozovo forest in central Kodry, an unprotected IBA (Grimmett and Jones 1989). Main threats are the reduction of food, the felling of old trees, and persecution and disturbance during the breeding season (N. Zubcov *in litt.* 1994).

* **Romania**

The Imperial Eagle is legally protected and included in the Red Data Book. Occurring in lowland forest near the Black Sea coast and along the Carpathians and Transylvanian Alps, it is present in the following IBAs: 002 Padurea Niculitel-Babadag (4–6 pairs, unprotected), 007 Canaraua Fetii (partially Nature Reserve, 2 pairs), 011 Cheile Bicazului and Lacul Rosu (Nature Reserve, 1–2 pairs), 022 Domogled Mountain (Nature Reserve) (Grimmett and Jones 1989). There are other breeding pairs which are included neither in IBAs nor in protected areas. The main threats to the species are forest management, persecution, egg-collecting, and general negative attitudes towards birds of prey. Knowledge about the population is scarce and there is no regular monitoring (Kalabér in prep.).

* **Russia**

Included as Vulnerable in the Russian Red Data Book of 1983 and expected to remain in the same category in the new edition. Existing conservation legislation is poorly enforced, and as a result young Imperial Eagles and other rare raptors are illegally taken and smuggled abroad (Raptor-Link 1993). The Imperial Eagle inhabits steppes, forest edges, semi-deserts and mountains between the Black and Caspian seas, and extends into central Asia and southern Siberia as far as Lake Baikal. In European Russia it is present in the northern Caucasus (30–40 pairs), Don river (40–50), Volga river and western Ural mountains (100–200) (V. Galushin 1995). It is a rare bird and declining locally due to habitat destruction, shortage of key prey (susliks), disturbance, nest-robbing, electrocution and smuggling. There is no current monitoring but a 2 year study is planned in the border area with the Ukraine.

* **Slovakia**

The Imperial Eagle is legally protected by the Law for the Conservation of Nature and is classified as Endangered in the Red Data Book of 1988. It occurs in southern parts of the country along the Hungarian border, mainly in areas of old deciduous forest but

in recent years some pairs are becoming established also in agricultural areas. It is present in the following Important Bird Areas: 05 Malé Karpaty mountains (Protected Landscape Area), 11 Poľana mountains (Protected Landscape Area Biosphere Reserve), 13 Slovenský kras karst (Protected Landscape Area Biosphere Reserve), 14 Slanské vrchy mountains (unprotected), 15 Vihorlatské vrchy mountains (Protected Landscape Area) (Hora and Kanuch 1992). Also in Východoslovenská nížina lowland (unprotected), Košická kotlina basin (unprotected), Slovenské rudohorie mountains (unprotected), Štiavnické vrchy hills (Protected Landscape Area), Vtáčnik mountains (Protected Landscape Area), Trábec mountains (Protected Landscape Area), Povazský Inovec mountains (unprotected). The main conservation problems are associated with destruction of breeding and feeding habitats, human disturbance, nest-robbing, illegal shooting and (potentially) electrocution. The population is very well monitored by the Group for the Protection of Birds of Prey and Owls of the Slovak Ornithological Society, and conservation action undertaken includes nest wardening, the securing of unstable nests and suslik reintroductions (Danko 1993, P. Kanuch *in litt* 1994).

* **Turkey**

The Imperial Eagle is legally protected and is classed as Rare in the Draft Red List of Threatened Animals of Turkey. Except in the south and south-east of the country, it is a very rare and local breeder and the decline in recent decades has been drastic. On migration and in winter it can occur anywhere across southern and western Turkey, and in central Anatolia (Kasperek 1992); the north-east of the country along the Black Sea coast is an important migration corridor. It is present as a breeding bird in the following IBAs: 008 Meriç Deltası (probably 1 pair, unprotected), 012 Ilgaz Dağları (probably breeds, partially National Park), 017 Yeniçaga Gölü (Grimmett and Jones 1989, M. Yazar *in litt.* 1994). Two further sites are important, and are candidates for inclusion in the revised IBA inventory: Beynam forest, a Forestry Recreation Area, and Yozgat forest, a National Park. The number of Imperial Eagles within IBAs and protected areas is very low. The reasons for the decline are not well understood although they are probably related to habitat alteration and poisoning. In north-east Turkey migrating raptors are regularly shot to feed the decoys used to trap Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus* for falconry; illegal shooting is a regular feature of several Turkish wetlands (Magnin 1988).

* **Ukraine**

The Imperial Eagle is protected by the Law for Nature Conservation and included in the Ukrainian Red Data Book of 1979. It occurs mainly in the north-east along the Seversky Donets river and in the Poltava lowlands (35 pairs), breeding in small old woodland plots of Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*; also in the Dnieper and Podol highlands (10 pairs) and in Crimea (five pairs). The coverage under protected areas is quite low and there is a problem of enforcement in the existing ones. The main conservation problems are logging of old forests (especially the felling of old trees), illegal shooting, human disturbance at breeding sites, changes in food availability, and pollution. There is no regular monitoring (Vetrov and Gorban 1994, V. Vetrov pers. comm. 1994).

* **Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)**

The Imperial Eagle is legally protected and included in the Red Data Book of former Yugoslavia. It occurs in hilly areas with deciduous forest and in grazing pastures/steppes. Most of the population is in Vojvodina, divided between two sites: Fruška gora (four pairs) and Deliblatska Pescara (6–7 pairs). The proportion within protected areas is good, Fruška Gora being a National Park and Deliblatska Pescara a Special Reserve, although the latter site is severely threatened by afforestation schemes. Imperial Eagles occurred formerly in southern Serbia but there are no recent breeding records (Vasic *et al.* 1985, Grimmett and Jones 1989, I. Ham pers. comm. 1993). Due to the current armed conflict in the area there is no monitoring of the species.

* **International**

The Eastern Imperial Eagle Working Group was created in 1990 at the headquarters of MME; it involves Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Greece, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, and has held three meetings so far. Cooperation between Hungary and Slovakia on Imperial Eagle protection is very good (Bagyura 1993, L. Haraszthy pers. comm. 1993).

PART 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

AIMS

1. In the short term, to maintain the present numbers of the Imperial Eagle throughout its present range.
2. In the medium to long term to ensure range expansion.

OBJECTIVES

1. POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE

- 1.1. **To promote policies which ensure long-term conservation of the Imperial Eagle and its habitat**

1.1.1. *Forestry*

Forest management can conflict with Imperial Eagle conservation in several European countries. Governments should review their forestry policies to ensure that they are compatible with the conservation of the Imperial Eagle. It is recommended that such policies should incorporate the following elements:

- (a) Priority for the protection of the wildlife resource.
- (b) Where the logging of indigenous forest is seen as acceptable, commercial forestry operators should allow some part of their holdings to evolve naturally without felling or planting.
- (c) The presence of the Imperial Eagle and other threatened birds should be taken into account in yearly forestry plans, and human activity should be prevented within 300 m of an active nest.
- (d) Agreements with landowners for appropriate management of forest areas should be pursued. This cooperation is essential to retain and, where possible, to enhance the value of forest remnants as refuges for biological diversity.
- (e) Precise guidelines for forest management in areas where sensitive species occur should be produced and disseminated.

Priority: high

Time-scale: medium

1.1.2. *Farming and agriculture*

The recent colonisation of agricultural areas by the Imperial Eagle in several east European countries shows the potential of such habitats to hold expanding populations. However, there can be conflict between the human activities which need to be carried out periodically in these areas and the Imperial Eagle's breeding success. With this in mind it is important to prepare guidelines for farming which are compatible with the presence of this species as a breeding bird.

The Imperial Eagle is a priority species in the European Agriculture Conservation Strategy currently being prepared by BirdLife International (Tucker *et al.* in press)

Priority: medium

Time-scale: short/medium

1.1.3. *Protected areas*

Protected-area policies and regulations should promote the following:

- (a) Conservation management of all the Important Bird Areas where the Imperial Eagle occurs.
- (b) Areas holding at least one pair of this species should be eligible for protected status designation.
- (c) Conservation of remaining original forest cover, particularly in lowland forests.
- (d) Endorse and implement the IUCN Action Plan for Protected Areas in Europe.

Priority: high

Time-scale: short/medium

1.1.4. *International cooperation*

The experience gathered in countries, such as Hungary and Slovakia, in designing and implementing successful conservation programmes for the Imperial Eagle should be acknowledged and exported to neighbouring range-states (e.g. Bulgaria, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Ukraine) at their request. Bilateral cooperation among these countries should be pursued. The Eastern Imperial Eagle Working Group could play an important role.

In more general terms, international support will be required to initiate or re-establish conservation programmes in those countries presently suffering from armed conflict or in great economic and social difficulties. Such help should focus on:

- (a) Assessing the damage to Important Bird Areas.
- (b) Strengthening legislation and institutions.
- (c) Training conservation specialists.
- (d) Research and monitoring.
- (e) Provision of funds and equipment.

Priority: high

Time-scale: short/medium

1.2. To promote national legislation which adequately protects the species and its habitat

Where appropriate, a review and update of national laws and regulations relating to nature conservation should be encouraged to ensure that:

- (a) The Imperial Eagle is given the maximum level of protection, and heavy penalties are instated for shooting, trapping, taking, poisoning, disturbing, possessing or trading specimens or their eggs.
- (b) Recovery plans and habitat management plans are foreseen for endangered species.
- (c) Environmental impact assessment is required for afforestation schemes, dam construction, powerlines or any other infrastructure likely to affect the habitat of the Imperial Eagle.
- (d) Poisoning is totally banned or strictly regulated.

Priority: high

Time-scale: medium

1.3. To promote implementation of international conventions and treaties

There are three major international treaties which list the Imperial Eagle: the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention); the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Washington Convention or CITES). These conventions, together with the Biodiversity Convention, provide an adequate framework for the conservation of the Imperial Eagle and its habitat, and all the countries where the species occurs are encouraged to sign, ratify and implement them.

Priority: high

Time-scale: long

2. SPECIES AND HABITAT PROTECTION

2.1. To ensure that the Imperial Eagle habitat retains the necessary conditions for the presence of the species

2.1.1. Promote the designation of all the Important Bird Areas where the species occurs as protected areas

The compilation of the directory of IBAs (Grimmett and Jones 1989) allowed the identification of many sites for the Imperial Eagle in Europe. In the short term, protection of those sites containing three or more pairs should be given priority; in the long term all sites holding breeding birds should be designated as protected areas.

Priority: high
Time-scale: short/long

2.1.2. *Encourage appropriate habitat management in unprotected sites*

There are a number of forest IBAs where the Imperial Eagle occurs which usually fall under the jurisdiction of forestry departments and are regularly exploited for timber production. These sites are not likely to be declared protected areas in the short term but it must be ensured that they retain their capacity to sustain Imperial Eagle populations. Careful monitoring is necessary to highlight any potentially harmful activities, and regular contact needs to be established between NGOs and forestry authorities to inform them about the location of breeding pairs and ensure that buffer zones are declared to prevent disturbance during the critical periods of incubation and rearing.

Priority: high
Time-scale: short/ongoing

2.1.3. *Encourage appropriate habitat management at privately owned sites*

In the case of areas which are unprotected and privately owned, landowners must be made aware of the existence of the Imperial Eagle and encouraged to manage the habitat according to the species' needs and to emphasise the importance of the conservation of biodiversity. Guidelines for habitat management should be provided to these landowners and state-supported environmentally sensitive management schemes should be launched. The possibility of giving a bonus to those properties where the Imperial Eagle successfully rears young should also be explored.

Priority: medium
Time-scale: medium/ongoing

2.1.4. *Provide artificial nest structures to avoid the loss of clutches and chicks due to bad weather*

If manpower and expertise are available, nests belonging to pairs attempting breeding for the first time should be secured to the supporting tree to ensure that they do not fall. It will occasionally be necessary to provide artificial nest structures to encourage birds away from areas prone to human disturbance. This sort of management activity should take place outside the breeding season, within the framework of a wider conservation programme, and by experienced personnel.

Priority: low
Time-scale: long

2.1.5. *Increase abundance and availability of key prey species*

In eastern Europe the suslik is a basic prey item for the Imperial Eagle. Attempts to restore suslik populations in Imperial Eagle areas should be undertaken whenever possible, and technical guidelines for such restoration should be produced by those organisations and agencies which already have the expertise. These attempts should be aimed at establishing viable suslik colonies in areas where they formerly occurred, and should take into consideration the principles of any reintroduction or restocking project including screening of the health of the released stock and monitoring of the results (Kleiman *et al.* 1994).

Priority: high
Time-scale: short/medium

2.2. To eliminate or control non-natural factors which are affecting the Imperial Eagle

2.2.1. Prevent nest-robbing and illegal trade

The following actions are suggested:

- (a) Increased surveillance and wardening of those nest-sites which are regularly robbed.
- (b) Heavy fines for taking birds should be included in national law and adequately publicised.
- (c) Stricter controls on captive-breeding centres.
- (d) The Eurogroup Against Bird Crime, national customs authorities, CITES Secretariat and TRAFFIC offices should be made aware of the illegal trade in Imperial Eagles and encouraged to take action. A permanent liaison and information exchange between the above organisations is essential.
- (e) European and former USSR zoos must be warned about the risks of accepting birds of uncertain origin.
- (f) More information needs to be gathered about the way nest-robbers operate and the routes of the illegal trade.

Priority: high

Time-scale: short

2.2.2. Prevent mortality by poisoning

The use of poison or anaesthetic to kill or capture birds and mammals is specifically prohibited by Appendix IV of the Bern Convention. The occurrence of poisoning must be permanently monitored in each European country, and the authorities must be alerted against the issuing of permits to poison wolves. If chemical analysis of corpses proves that secondary poisoning is responsible for the deaths of Imperial Eagles or other birds of prey, a case should be brought to the courts of justice. Alternative methods for the selective control of species which are causing damage to livestock or agriculture must be brought to the attention of the authorities and farmers.

Priority: high

Time-scale: short/ongoing

2.2.3. Control illegal hunting

Governments should be urged to enforce hunting regulations and increase surveillance in protected areas where Imperial Eagles occur, especially wetlands. Awareness campaigns targeted at hunters' associations should be undertaken in those areas where the problem is especially acute. At migration bottlenecks public education among the local population is also necessary (see 4.1.); the acquisition or leasing of land at mountain passes should be explored, as it has proved an effective way of preventing shooting at Orgambidexka in the western Pyrenees.

Priority: medium

Time-scale: medium/ongoing

2.2.4. Reduce mortality from electrocution by powerlines

For a species which hunts in open landscapes, electricity poles and pylons are an attractive perch, and mortality due to electrocution probably has a significant effect on Imperial Eagle populations in Europe. It is essential to locate the actual pylons where electrocution occurs most often and then urge the companies owning the lines to undertake appropriate modifications. In the case of lines under construction, it has to be ensured that the routing does not affect areas critical for the Imperial Eagle and that corrective measures against electrocution are incorporated. Much expertise has been developed in the field of designing electricity pylons to make them safe for

birds, both in western Europe and in the United States, and this information must be made available to those organisations and agencies involved in Imperial Eagle conservation.

Priority: high

Time-scale: short/ongoing

2.2.5. Prevent human disturbance

In cases where human disturbance is a persistent cause of breeding failure, wardening should be organised to prevent both intentional and unintentional disturbance to nesting birds. Such schemes can be carried out with the help of volunteers who must be adequately briefed to avoid becoming a disturbance themselves. Nest wardening also provides the opportunity to gather information about the species' biology. It is essential that wardens are provided with equipment to carry out their observations from a long distance, and with radios to seek assistance from the authorities if required.

Priority: medium

Time-scale: medium/ongoing

2.2.6. Reduce incidental mortality from trapping

The use of leg-hold traps for the commercial capture of fur-bearing animals is widespread in several countries across the Imperial Eagle's range. This method of trapping is prohibited by the Bern Convention, and enforcement should be encouraged in all signatory countries where the Imperial Eagle occurs. The use of sight-baited leg-hold traps should be discouraged in all areas frequently used by eagles.

Priority: low

Time-scale: medium/ongoing

3. MONITORING AND RESEARCH

3.1. To initiate a monitoring programme for the Imperial Eagle

In each country where the species breeds, a network of competent field ornithologists needs to be developed for monitoring of the Imperial Eagle. During March–April all nesting areas should be checked to locate active nests and verify incubation; in May all the nests should be visited again to see whether the young have hatched and how many there are; the final visit is done at the end of July to count the fledglings. Exceptional care must be taken in order not to disrupt the reproduction process and cause desertion, especially during the incubation and early rearing periods. Climbing of the nest trees should be avoided except for ringing or marking purposes, and in this case it should only be done by experienced personnel under the appropriate license.

Priority: high

Time-scale: short/ongoing

3.2. To undertake national surveys

During 1995 and 1996 special efforts are needed to clarify the population status of the Imperial Eagle. This has to be done through surveys at the national level, involving the optimum number of professional and amateur ornithologists. Guidelines for all the participants in these surveys must be produced by the coordinators of the survey in each country. The expertise in Imperial Eagle conservation which exists in countries such as Hungary and Slovakia must be brought into these surveys and it would be desirable that experts from those countries participate in them.

Priority: high

Time-scale: short

3.3. To gather new data about the location of wintering areas and migration routes

Satellite-tracking of migratory eagles has proved an effective way to delineate the migration route, to identify mortality factors during migration, and to locate the wintering areas of particular populations. Current studies about this topic should be continued and expanded, with a special emphasis on the Imperial Eagle.

Priority: high

Time-scale: ongoing

3.4. To promote research which helps identify limiting factors and causes of mortality

A better understanding of the species' habitat use, the home-range of adult pairs, and the movements of the young after leaving the nest would be very helpful for future conservation efforts. Radio-tracking is easily available now and provides these kinds of data; marking and tracking a few fledglings in the nest, and some breeding adults, with radio-transmitters would permit the gathering of very useful information about the risks and threats that these birds undergo in their day-to-day life.

Priority: medium

Time-scale: medium

3.5. Update and complete national IBA inventories

The European IBA inventory of 1989 is being reviewed and updated by BirdLife Partners and representatives, and an IBA database is being established at the BirdLife Secretariat. There are plans to publish a new inventory by 1996. National IBA inventories are also being reviewed and published separately.

Priority: high

Time-scale: ongoing

4. PUBLIC AWARENESS AND TRAINING

4.1. To improve and maintain awareness, concern and support for the protection of the Imperial Eagle and its habitat

The Imperial Eagle has great potential to be used as a symbol of the lowland forests which covered Europe in the past. Public information programmes should be geared to provide updated, accurate information on the status and needs of eagles and the relationship between eagle recovery and the well-being of man. While support must be sought from the general public, specific problems such as indiscriminate shooting, the use of poison and traps must be resolved by focusing efforts on specific groups. The costs associated with the species' recovery must be supported by an informed public.

Priority: medium

Time-scale: medium/ongoing

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ANNEX 1. RECOMMENDED CONSERVATION ACTIONS BY COUNTRY

*** Armenia**

Recent international ornithological surveys have begun to clarify the status of several species. At present there is insufficient information on Imperial Eagle to make recommendations, but future reviews should aim to give recommendations for this and other globally-threatened species.

*** Azerbaijan**

At present there is insufficient information on Imperial Eagle to make recommendations, but future reviews should aim to give recommendations for this and other globally-threatened species.

*** Bulgaria**

1.1.1. Prepare guidelines to avoid disturbance by forestry, farming and agricultural operations in Imperial Eagle areas, and disseminate to local forestry offices and landowners.

1.1.4. Assist neighbouring countries, at their request, with surveys and with the setting up of monitoring programmes.

1.2. Promote strengthened legal protection of the Imperial Eagle and increase the penalty for killing or taking specimens or eggs.

Promote protection by law those solitary trees which hold Imperial Eagle nests.

2.1.1. Promote designation of protected areas to cover Imperial Eagle territories in the eastern Rhodope mountains, Strandzha mountains, Sakar, Sredna Gora mountains and other regions of importance for the species.

2.1.4. Provide artificial nest structures and prevent human activities during the incubation and early rearing periods within 300 m of nest-sites of pairs attempting to breed in agricultural areas.

2.1.5. Undertake the restoration of suslik populations in appropriate areas where the Imperial Eagle occurs.

2.2.1. Organise wardening for nests which are regularly robbed or disturbed.

Promote enforcement of CITES and the establishment of stricter customs controls to prevent the smuggling of Imperial Eagles and other threatened species out of Bulgaria.

2.2.2. Promote a total ban on the use of poisoned bait.

- 3.1. Initiate a long-term conservation programme including year-to-year monitoring of all the pairs and their breeding success.
- 3.3. Carry out research on the impact of electrocution on, and the habitat requirements of, the Imperial Eagle, and use the data from the monitoring programme to establish the population dynamics of the species.
- 4.1. Initiate a public awareness campaign and produce educational materials particularly to achieve a positive response to the eagles' return to the populated lowlands.

*** Croatia**

- 1.1.3./3.2. During 1996 an international team should visit the occupied areas of Croatia and carry out a survey of potential breeding and feeding sites.
- 2.1.1. Promote the protection of key migrating and wintering sites (e.g. Kopacki rit) which are currently occupied and inaccessible to Croatian scientists and conservation authorities.
- 3.2. Assess the current situation of the Imperial Eagle outside the occupied territories and start a monitoring programme if a resident population is still present.
- 3.5. The Croatian IBA inventory needs to be updated and completed, especially in respect of mountain and forest areas.

*** Cyprus**

- 3.2. Assess the current situation of the Imperial Eagle and start a monitoring programme if a resident population is still present.

*** Georgia**

- 1.1.1. Promote restrictions in the exploitation of forests in floodlands, arid woodlands and low mountains, and provide legal protection to old forests.
- 1.1.4. Promote better coordination among ornithologists working in the Caucasus in order to undertake joint efforts for the conservation of the Imperial Eagle in central Transcaucasia.
- 1.2. Discourage the use of traps for mammals and ban the use of poisoned baits.
- 2.1.1. Promote the protection of all Imperial Eagle territories.
- 2.2.3. Promote enforcement of hunting regulations to prevent illegal shooting.
- 2.2.5. Promote restrictions to human activities around active nests during the breeding season.

- 3.2. Undertake a national survey.
- 4.1. Use the media to raise public awareness about nature conservation in general and the Imperial Eagle in particular.

* **Greece**

- 1.1.2./2.1. Promote extension of the protected-area network and management of key sites for the species.
- 1.2. Promote preparation of a comprehensive recovery plan for the Imperial Eagle.
- 2.1.1. Promote designation as Special Protection Areas of all those sites where the Imperial Eagle occurs as a breeding or wintering species.
- 2.2.2. Promote a complete ban, or strictly control the use of poisoned bait.
- 3.1. Research the past distribution of the species.
- 3.2. Monitor closely any possible breeding attempts.
- 4.1./2.2.3. Increase public awareness of the problem of hunting in wintering areas in and around major wetlands, especially along the west coast and in the Peloponnesus, and promote increased surveillance.

* **Hungary**

- 1.1.1. Prepare precise guidelines for forest management in areas where the Imperial Eagle and other sensitive forest species occur, delimiting the periods when forest activities can take place and establishing buffer zones around nest-sites.
- 1.1.3. Promote legal protection to lowland habitats where Imperial Eagles forage and which are rich in susliks.
- 1.1.4. Assist neighbouring countries, at their request, with surveys of the Imperial Eagle and with the development of conservation and monitoring programmes for the species.
- 1.2. Promote preparation of a comprehensive recovery plan.
- 2.1.1. Encourage the extension of Zemplén Landscape Protection Reserve to encompass those Imperial Eagle pairs which lie outside the existing protected area.
- 2.2.4. Undertake an inventory of critical localities for the electrocution of birds of prey and urge the companies responsible for the powerlines to adopt corrective measures.
- 3.1. Continue and strengthen the project for the conservation and monitoring of the Imperial Eagle that has been successfully implemented by MME during recent years.

* **Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

1.1.4. Seek international support to assess the situation of the Imperial Eagle and to start a monitoring programme.

3.2./

3.4./3.5. Evaluate the status and condition of IBAs.

* **Middle East**

1.2. Promote legal protection of all birds of prey.

2.2.2. Promote bans or strict controls on the use of poisons for mammal control (e.g. foxes, rats) at sites where Imperial Eagles congregate.

3.1. Monitor all sites where Imperial Eagles occur regularly.

4.1. Raise awareness amongst military leaders in Middle East countries of the importance of Imperial Eagles and other birds of prey.

* **Moldova**

1.2. Promote strengthening and enforcement of existing bird protection legislation.

2.1.1. Encourage improved protection status of Kodri forest and promote the creation of a National Park in the centre of the Republic.

3.2. Establish contact with the local ornithologists, gather available information and undertake a national survey.

* **Romania**

3.2. Undertake a national survey of the Imperial Eagle and start a monitoring programme; international cooperation for this survey should be sought if necessary.

4.1./2.2.2. Carry out an awareness campaign highlighting the role of birds of prey as ecological regulators of rodents and other potential pest species. Stress the threat posed by the use of poisoned bait for wolf control and illegal shooting.

* **Russia**

1.2. Promote strengthening of existing legislation for the protection of rare birds.

Encourage the development of a comprehensive recovery plan for the Imperial Eagle through cooperation between government, ornithological NGOs, etc.

2.2.1. Promote enforcement of CITES and stricter customs controls to prevent the smuggling of Imperial Eagles and other threatened species out of Russia.

- 3.1. Establish a network of contacts throughout the country and carry out thorough population surveys and regular monitoring, seeking international cooperation if required.

* **Slovakia**

- 1.1.1. Promote a review of forestry policies to ensure long-term protection of forests as a habitat of the Imperial Eagle and other threatened species.

Encourage the preparation of precise guidelines for forest management in areas where the Imperial Eagle and other sensitive species occur, delimiting the periods when forest activities can take place and establishing buffer zones around nest-sites.

- 1.1.3. Promote appropriate conservation management in all protected areas where the Imperial Eagle occurs.

- 1.1.4. Assist neighbouring countries, at their request, with surveys of the Imperial Eagle and with the development of conservation and monitoring programmes.

- 1.2. Promote preparation of a recovery plan for the Imperial Eagle through collaboration between the conservation bodies and authorities concerned.

- 2.1.1. Promote the designation as protected areas of the most important sites for the Imperial Eagle in Slovakia.

- 2.1.3. Establish regular contacts with private landowners and encourage them to manage the habitat for the benefit of the Imperial Eagle.

- 2.1.4. Undertake work to repair or fix in place those nests which are threatened by weather damage.

- 2.1.5. Encourage the restoration of suslik populations in appropriate areas where the Imperial Eagle occurs.

- 2.2.1. Promote enforcement of CITES and stricter customs controls to prevent the smuggling of Imperial Eagles and other threatened species out of Russia.

- 2.2.1. Encourage wardening schemes for nests which are regularly robbed and/or disturbed.

- 2.2.4. Undertake an inventory of critical localities for the electrocution of birds of prey and encourage the adoption of corrective measures.

- 2.2.5. Encourage restrictions on human activities during the incubation and early rearing periods within 300 m of nest-sites of pairs attempting to breed in agricultural areas.

- 3.1. Continue and expand the existing monitoring and management programme to the whole range of the Imperial Eagle in Slovakia.
- 3.2. Carry out a national survey involving an optimum number of ornithologists.
- 3.4. Carry out research on population dynamics and habitat requirements, paying special attention to the recolonisation of agricultural areas.
- 3.5. Review and update the Slovak IBA inventory to include areas where the Imperial Eagle occurs.
- 4.1. Raise public awareness and support for the protection of the Imperial Eagle, especially in areas where its conservation comes into conflict with the interests of local landowners.
- 4.1./2.2.3. Undertake an education campaign about the threat of shooting of birds of prey in Slovakia.

* **Turkey**

- 2.1.1. Promote the designation as protected areas of those IBAs where the Imperial Eagle occurs.
- 3.2. Undertake surveys in appropriate areas.
- 3.5. Update and complete the IBA inventory, especially with respect to mountain and forest areas.
- 4.1. Undertake an education campaign about the shooting of migratory birds of prey in north-east Turkey.

* **Ukraine**

1.2. Promote the development of new legislation for nature conservation.

2.1.1. Promote the designation as protected areas of IBAs containing Imperial Eagles.

3.2. Undertake a national survey and initiate a monitoring programme.

3.5. Review and update the existing IBA inventory.