



Preface by CAFF and Steering Committee Chairmen

The eyes of the world are turning northwards. In recent years, interest in the Arctic has increased dramatically within and outside of Arctic countries. This is reflected in the amount of attention given to Arctic biodiversity. While the landscapes and wildlife have been the subject of explorers, scientists, artists and photographers as well as the home of a variety of peoples for a long time, until recently Arctic biodiversity did not feature very prominently in national or international policy work. This, however, is changing, as the unique values of Arctic nature are increasingly discussed at high levels. At the same time, more and more attention has been paid to the interface between science and policy to ensure that policy is built on the best science available.

We are therefore very happy and proud to present the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA), which has been seven years in the making. It is the result of the contributions from 253 scientists together with holders of traditional knowledge. The chapters in the main document, which you are holding now, have been peer-reviewed by over 100 scientists from all over the Arctic and the rest of the world. We are very grateful for the efforts they have made to ensure the quality of this assessment. We would especially like to thank Chief Scientist Hans Meltofte and the lead authors of the chapters.

In order to communicate the findings presented in this scientific work and to inform policy makers, the board of the Arctic Council's working group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) has prepared a summary of the key findings and developed policy recommendations. The key findings and recommendations have been provided in a separate document, which we trust will be useful for all those who make decisions that may affect Arctic biodiversity.

The Arctic is home to a vast array of biodiversity, including many globally significant populations. Included among these are 30% of the world's shorebird species, two thirds of the global numbers of geese, several million reindeer and caribou, and many unique mammals, such as the polar bear. During the short summer breeding season, almost 200 species of birds arrive from almost all parts of the world, connecting the Arctic with the rest of the globe. We therefore hope that the ABA will be consulted frequently within as well as outside of the Arctic.

Biodiversity is life. It is the very foundation of our existence on Earth. In the Arctic, links between biodiversity and traditional ways of life are often seen more clearly than in many other parts of the world. These are examples of ecosystem services, the benefits that we receive from nature. Many ecosystems and ecosystem functions in the Arctic remain largely unstudied and involve little-known organisms, especially microbes. The ABA presents current knowledge also on these processes and organisms and thus provides a base for further work.

But biodiversity is more than a means for humankind to survive. The unique nature of the Arctic is not just an asset for us to use. It is also a source of wonder, enjoyment and inspiration to people living in the Arctic and across the globe. It has intrinsic values that cannot be measured. We sincerely hope that the ABA will not only create the baseline reference for scientific understanding about Arctic biodiversity, but that it also may inspire people to take effective actions on the conservation of Arctic flora and fauna. We hope it gives people reasons to love Arctic nature as much as we do.

Yakutsk, 17 February 2013

Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Chair of CAFF

Mark Marissink, Chair of the ABA Steering Committee