



WWF

REPORT

2018

SAVING OUR LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

HOW WWF WORKS WITH THE RAMSAR CONVENTION
TO PROTECT THE WORLD'S WETLANDS



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Lead author: Evan Jeffries

Very special thanks to Denis Landenbergue for his contribution to this report and his incredible work as WWF’s focal point on the Ramsar Convention over the last 20 years. Denis has been instrumental in the designation of countless Ramsar sites as well as a driving force behind efforts to strengthen the management and protection of wetlands. He was presented with the Award for Management by Ramsar in 2008.

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WETLANDS SUSTAIN LIFE

Wetlands are essential to human wellbeing, inclusive economic growth, and climate mitigation and adaptation. They provide water for human consumption and agriculture.



They protect our shores and help make cities and settlements safe and resilient. They are the Earth’s greatest natural carbon stores. They support biodiversity and abundant and unique nature.

They provide sustainable livelihoods and are essential to human health and wellbeing. Wetlands provide myriad benefits and services to people and nature.

Yet, the value of wetlands and the services they provide are dangerously undervalued. An inexplicable omission given the pivotal role wetlands play in delivering global commitments on climate change, sustainable development, biodiversity and disaster risk reduction. Wetlands contribute to 75 indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) alone.

The science is clear, and the need to protect the world’s remaining wetlands is imperative – and yet, today, their future hangs in the balance.

Urbanisation encroaches on agricultural land, and wetlands are converted for cultivation. Excessive water is withdrawn for all kinds of purposes, and natural flows are unnaturally regulated. Freshwater resources from fish to timber are overexploited. Channels silt up, become polluted, suffer nutrient-loading from agricultural run-off. Invasive species devastate native populations. And climate change is bringing problems of its own while intensifying the effects of other factors.

All of this is, quite simply, unsustainable. If we don’t take serious and immediate global action to halt the ongoing misuse and destruction of our essential wetland ecosystems, we have no chance of meeting the SDGs, and the future of the planet will be fraught with risk and uncertainty.

For nearly 50 years, the Ramsar Convention has embodied our determination to create a better future for the planet’s wetlands – and, by extension, for all life on Earth. Today, the Ramsar Convention’s list of Wetlands of International Importance includes more than 2,300 locations making it the largest network of protected areas in the world.

Over the past two decades WWF has been a critical partner in our mission, supporting the designation of internationally protected wetland areas on five continents, collaborating with Contracting Parties to implement policies that conserve and protect wetlands, promoting the importance of wetlands to people and nature, and campaigning to halt the destruction of what remains of these critical ecosystems.

The need for this work has never been greater, and there is no time to lose. The decisive moment is now. I invite the global community to join Ramsar and WWF in taking action to conserve and sustainably use wetlands. If we do, they will in turn continue to give us life.

Martha Rojas Urrego,
Secretary General,
Ramsar Convention
on Wetlands

**“THE VALUE OF
WETLANDS AND THE
SERVICES THEY PROVIDE
ARE DANGEROUSLY
UNDervalUED.”**

THE TRUE VALUE OF WETLANDS

From water supplies and food security to sustainable cities and rural livelihoods, healthy wetlands are essential for our daily survival – and for solving humanity’s most pressing challenges.



And yet, the world’s wetlands are in crisis. The first ever Global Wetland Outlook estimates that 35 per cent have been lost in the past 45 years, while WWF’s

Living Planet Report shows that freshwater biodiversity has declined by more than 80 per cent over a similar period – shocking indicators of the damage being done to wetlands across the globe.

As the international community galvanizes its efforts to meet 2030’s Sustainable Development Goals, the central importance of wetlands to many of the key targets has been thrown into sharp focus. And it is about time.

Swamps, bogs, marshes and mangroves may not be as famous or photo-friendly as cloud forests and coral reefs, but we can’t survive without them and as climate change becomes an inescapable reality, wetlands offer us opportunities to build resilience, mitigate some of its effects and adapt to others. As extreme weather events increase, healthy wetlands provide the best natural defence against devastating floods and storm surges.

The Ramsar Convention remains our best hope for protecting these precious resources and ensuring a long-term future for thousands of threatened species, from freshwater fish and marine turtles to corals and migratory birds, while securing the essential benefits that healthy wetlands can provide for people. Benefits that are just as important in vast megacities as they are in indigenous communities: everybody in the world needs wetlands.

For the last 20 years, WWF has been one of the Ramsar Convention’s most committed partners, supporting the designation of almost 110 million hectares of Ramsar sites across the world - an area roughly twice the size of Spain. But we need to do much more.

WWF’s global goal – the point we need to reach, if we’re to have a sustainable future – is to protect 30 per cent of the planet’s land and sea areas, including wetlands.

There are still huge areas of globally important wetlands that need urgent protection, and through Ramsar we’re convening, collaborating and cooperating with many governments and international partners to bring this about.

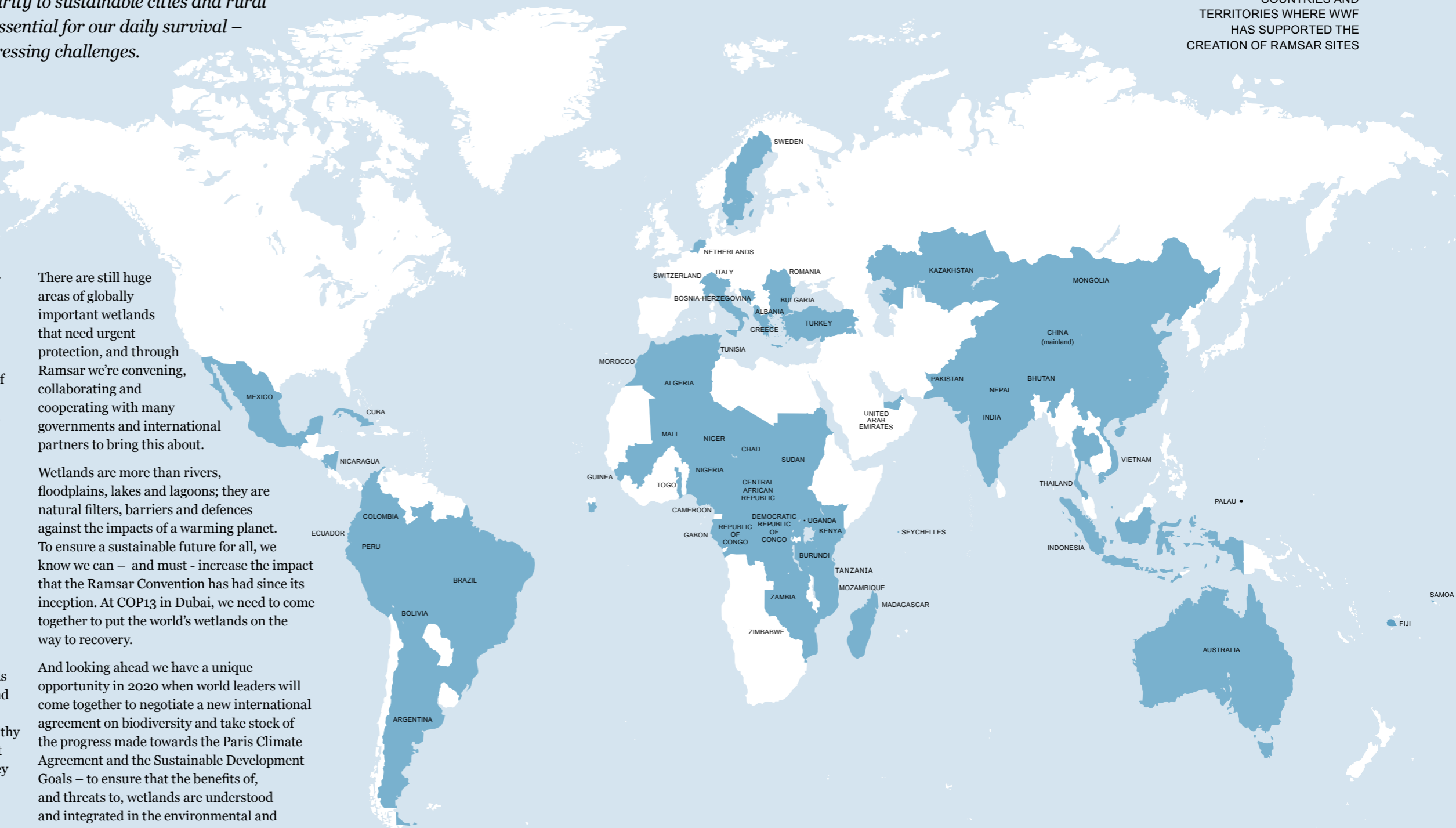
Wetlands are more than rivers, floodplains, lakes and lagoons; they are natural filters, barriers and defences against the impacts of a warming planet. To ensure a sustainable future for all, we know we can – and must - increase the impact that the Ramsar Convention has had since its inception. At COP13 in Dubai, we need to come together to put the world’s wetlands on the way to recovery.

And looking ahead we have a unique opportunity in 2020 when world leaders will come together to negotiate a new international agreement on biodiversity and take stock of the progress made towards the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals – to ensure that the benefits of, and threats to, wetlands are understood and integrated in the environmental and sustainable development agendas.

It’s time to pump up our action for wetlands, for nature and people everywhere.

Marco Lambertini,
Director General,
WWF International

COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES WHERE WWF HAS SUPPORTED THE CREATION OF RAMSAR SITES



“WWF HAS SUPPORTED THE DESIGNATION OF ALMOST 110 MILLION HECTARES OF RAMSAR SITES ACROSS THE WORLD – AN AREA ROUGHLY TWICE THE SIZE OF SPAIN”

	HECTARES
AFRICA	73,743,532
LATIN AMERICA	22378660
EUROPE/MIDDLE EAST	6161315
ASIA	5925309
TOTAL	108,208,816

INTRODUCTION

Humanity is at a crossroads. Between now and 2030, the conservation and development choices and actions taken by the international community will decide our long-term future. The Sustainable Development Goals show where we want – and need – to get to. The question is how we’re going to get there.

If our answer doesn’t prioritize a serious global commitment to conserving wetlands of all kinds, it won’t be good enough. Healthy wetlands are non-negotiable for life as we know it, and – from clean water supplies to food security, from sustainable cities to climate resilience – if you take them, and the biodiversity they support, out of the equation the whole edifice crumbles.

And yet wetlands remain undervalued, and the full spectrum of their benefits is still not properly understood. Rivers aren’t just conduits for water for

irrigation and hydropower, swamps aren’t just future cropland waiting to be drained, and mangrove forests aren’t just worthless tangles of vegetation taking up precious shrimp farming space. Instead, the economic, social and environmental values of our wetlands are complex and far-reaching – but they often only become truly visible as they start to disappear.

Unfortunately, they’re doing so at a shocking rate. The International Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) estimates that

wetlands have lost 87 per cent of their extent in the modern era. And the rate of loss has increased since 2000 according to Ramsar’s first ever Global Wetlands Outlook: the world is now losing up to 1.6 per cent of its wetlands each year. Needless to say, habitat loss on this scale has had a devastating impact on wetland biodiversity with populations of freshwater species declining by over 80 per cent in the last 40 years. A quarter of all the wetland-dependent species assessed by the IUCN Red List are now threatened with extinction. It’s clear this trajectory can’t be allowed to continue.

RAMSAR CONVENTION

The Ramsar Convention is our best hope for reversing the losses. Adopted in 1971 in the Iranian town of the same name, the Ramsar Convention is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Ramsar uses a broad definition of wetlands. It includes all lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands, peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas

and tidal flats, mangroves and other coastal areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs and salt pans. All of them have a role to play in sustainable development.

Since the Convention came into force in 1975, almost 90 per cent of UN member states have signed up: there are currently 170 ‘Contracting Parties’. Joining means taking active steps to conserve wetlands: when they sign up, nations must designate at least one wetland site

within their territory for inclusion on the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

The first site to be designated was Australia’s Cobourgh Peninsula in 1974 – a remote wilderness area recognized for its diversity of habitats, threatened marine species, and significant seabird colonies. By September 2018, the list had grown to include more than 2,300 wetlands around the world, covering almost 250 million hectares. These range from enormous areas like Ngiri-Tumba-Maindombe in the Democratic Republic of Congo

(DRC) and Queen Maud Gulf in Canada, both of which spread across more than 6 million hectares, to others – such as Long Bay Pond in the UK – which are less than a hectare in total.

The UK leads the way in terms of numbers, with 170 listed sites. Mexico follows, with 142. Brazil has the largest area protected – 24.6 million hectares – while Bolivia, Canada, Chad, DRC and Russia have each designated more than 10 million hectares under the Convention.

The largest area of all was only designated in 2018 – this is both a daunting reminder of how much work we still have to do, and a heartening indicator of how far Ramsar can reach. Brazil’s Rio Negro site – officially number 2,335 on the Ramsar list – covers 12 million hectares around the largest tributary in the north of the Amazon basin, protecting the rich biodiversity of its flooded forests, savannahs and archipelagos. The ethnically and culturally diverse local communities of the Rio Negro also benefit, with the site’s protected areas geared to support their traditional low-impact resource use and sustainable agriculture. Further afield, the eco-system services provided by the site support at least six Brazilian municipalities; and its contribution to the vital climate regulation of the Amazon rainforest affects the whole world.

But Ramsar designation is just the beginning of efforts to safeguard the world’s most important wetlands. The majority of the sites face some kind of threat with 48 currently on the Montreux Record, which is a register of wetlands where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of human interference.

WWF AND WETLANDS

Wetlands have been a central focus of WWF’s work since its creation. In fact, in 1969 one of our very first campaigns



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resulted in the creation of the now world-famous Donana National Park in Spain, protecting vital wetlands from the threat of drainage for commercial agriculture and development of beach resorts. We’ve also been getting our feet wet in marshes and mudflats, rivers and reefs for decades, partnering with communities and governments to strengthen protection, restore degraded areas, reduce threats and manage specific wetlands.

In 2001, we formally became one of Ramsar’s six International Organization Partners (see box page 11). In the same year, the first Ramsar site designation – Ciénaga de Zapata in Cuba – supported by the WWF International Freshwater Programme was formally secured. Since then we’ve worked with Contracting Parties and many other partners around the world to create 377 sites in 52 countries, amounting to almost 110 million hectares of internationally protected wetland sites – just under half the total area on the Ramsar List.

WWF’s international reach has been a key factor in several states signing up to the Convention over the last

two decades. We’ve succeeded where diplomatic activities are challenging, to say the least: North Korea is the most recent Ramsar signatory, joining this year with the help of several partners, including WWF. Bringing Angola on board is next on our list of priorities, which would be another major step towards full global membership of the Ramsar Convention – a target for its 50th birthday in 2021.

This same international reach has also enabled us to support several regional initiatives, such as the Mediterranean Wetlands and the Amazon Basin Wetlands initiatives – valuable Ramsar instruments that enhance wetland cooperation at a regional scale: water, after all, doesn’t tend to recognize national frontiers. The importance of regional engagement was highlighted in 2018 with the signing of the Pantanal Declaration by Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay. This calls for conservation and sustainable development of the world’s largest tropical wetland, and opens the door to far more effective cross-border cooperation on wetland issues in the region.

DONANA IS IN OUR DNA

The protection of Donana – one of the most important wetlands left in Europe – helped trigger the creation of WWF.

The “Fund” was established to raise money to buy the last remaining marshlands and avoid their drainage for commercial agriculture and eucalyptus plantations, and it succeeded: in 1969 Donana National Park was created, including the two pieces of land acquired by WWF. It was the first protected wetland in Spain at a time when wetlands were regarded as dirty and unhealthy wastes of space. A new era of wetland conservation had begun.

A critical stopover point for millions of migratory birds and a breeding site for many threatened species of waterfowl, Imperial eagles and Iberian lynxes, Donana was designated a Ramsar site in 1982, when Spain ratified the Convention. Twelve years later, its 50,000 hectares of marshlands, Mediterranean shrublands, pristine beaches and dune systems also became a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

All through these years, WWF has continued campaigning to conserve Donana, hand in hand with international institutions – denouncing misuse of water since the 80s, stopping new coastal developments in the early 90s, fighting the consequences of a mine spill in 1998, and averting an oil pipeline and the dredging of the Guadalquivir river so far this century. And we are still working with farmers, authorities and retail markets to ensure that farming is compatible with the conservation of the site. Ramsar Advisory Missions have been a key part of this process.

Donana is still not ‘saved’ and climate change is adding yet more challenges. But we will keep collaborating with partners to conserve it and demonstrate how sustainable development depends on healthy wetlands.



Luc Hoffman
One of the world's most influential conservationists. He helped establish WWF, the Ramsar Convention and Donana National Park.



Denis Landenbergue
Driving force behind WWF's Ramsar work.

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Getting our feet wet: Tagging river dolphins in the Amazon to monitor their movements inside and outside protected areas.

“THE WISE USE OF OUR WETLANDS WILL BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF ANY WORKABLE SOLUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE”

While it’s our conservation knowhow and partnerships, including with governments and communities, that makes the most difference in individual sites, we also devote a lot of energy and resources to increasing the scope and effectiveness of the Convention itself. We’ve helped to develop and support important resolutions (see page 29) concerning everything from dams to cultural values and the Ramsar Wetland City Accreditation, which we trust will mark a big step forwards in urban wetland management.

A CRITICAL MISSION

Ramsar’s mission brings together critical aspects of almost all our major conservation and development challenges, and it needs to be backed by everyone with an interest in a sustainable future. To take probably

the most pressing global issue of all, the wise use of our wetlands will be an integral part of any workable solution to climate change. Wetlands are the planet’s most effective carbon sinks and represent unrealised potential for climate mitigation. Peatlands are particularly important as they store twice as much carbon as the world’s forest biomass, while drained peatlands alone are responsible for 5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Coastal wetlands – mangroves, tidal flats and seagrass beds – also play an important role in carbon sequestration.

Along with the significant contribution they can make to climate mitigation and increasingly urgent efforts to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees, healthy wetlands – if wisely used and managed – will also play a major role in climate adaptation. Rising

temperatures bring sea level rise and greater storm surges, while extreme floods, droughts and heatwaves are already leaving a trail of destruction around the globe. But robust wetlands – like dense mangroves that protect coastal regions, and floodplains that help absorb excess flood waters – all have a vital role to play as we adapt to the inevitable realities of a warming world. The more of them we can preserve under Ramsar, the more resilient we’ll be.

And, of course, wetland ecosystems provide vital services without which our growing global population will struggle to survive. From providing fresh water to filling the rice paddies and supporting the fisheries that help sustain billions, they literally keep us alive. With more of us sharing the planet’s limited resources all the time, the last thing we can afford to do

is damage what’s left of them. Yet it’s estimated that adverse changes to wetlands, including coral reefs, result in annual global losses of ecosystem services worth more than US\$20 trillion.

This brings the urgency of Ramsar’s mission into sharp focus, and shows why protecting and restoring wetlands needs to be much higher up the global community’s conservation priorities.

Wetlands have certainly always been a priority for WWF and over the following pages, we highlight just a few of the Ramsar sites that WWF helped countries to designate as well as some of our ongoing work on the ground and other major Ramsar-related conservation achievements of the past two decades.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION PARTNERS (IOPS)

A unique element of the Ramsar Convention is the space it has created for civil society engagement.

Six global NGOs are given formal status under the convention as IOPs. BirdLife International, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Wetlands International and WWF have all been associated with the Convention since its beginnings.

In 2005, the Parties endorsed the addition of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) as the fifth International Organization Partner of the Convention, and in 2015 they approved the status for the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT).

The IOPs have over the years provided invaluable support for the work of the Convention, by providing expert technical advice, field level implementation assistance, and financial support, both from their headquarters units and their national and regional offices as well as their expert networks. The IOPs have just signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Convention, which will enhance joint efforts and overall conservation and development impact.





10 HUGE SUCCESSES

WWF has helped to secure protection for some truly vast wetland areas over the past 20 years. Here are 10 of the largest:

LLANOS DE MOXOS, BOLIVIA 6.9 million hectares

1 These vast tropical savannas are home to thousands of species, including the endangered giant otter, blue-throated macaw and Bolivian river dolphin, and support communities belonging to eight indigenous groups. The area contributes immensely to the healthy functioning of the Amazon basin.

NGIRI-TUMBA-MAINDOMBE, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO 6.6 million hectares

2 Rich in biodiversity, this huge wetland shelters forest elephants, three species of crocodile and over 150 species of fish. It is vital for local communities and the city of Mbandaka, providing clean water, supporting agriculture and fishing, and mitigating the impact of extreme floods.

SUDD, SOUTH SUDAN 5.7 million hectares

3 Sustained by the White Nile, these enormous swamps form a giant filter that controls water quality, and a giant sponge that stabilises water flow. Supporting many vulnerable endemic and migratory species, the Sudd's seasonal changes in size play a central role in local agriculture.

PLAINES D'INONDATION DES BAHR AOUK ET SALAMAT, CHAD 4.9 million hectares

4 One of Africa's largest sites, it boasts rivers, floodplains and lakes that are vital for migratory birds as well as elephants and other species. The wetlands also support productive fisheries and extensive seasonal grazing. But they face numerous threats from over exploitation.

LUFIRA BASIN, DRC 4.5 million hectares

5 A network of rivers, lakes and swamp forests, this site contains the world's second highest waterfall (384m high Lofoi) and a wealth of wildlife, including the rare Upemba lechwe. It also provides water supplies for local communities and is a major carbon sink.

All the sites above are larger than Switzerland



4 MILLION HECTARES

COMPLEJO DE HUMEDALES DEL ABANICO DEL RIO PASTAZA, PERU 3.8 million hectares

6 Volcanic sediments flowing down from the Andes form an enormous alluvial fan along the river Pastaza and its tributaries, creating a huge diversity of permanent and seasonal wetland types. These are home to nearly 300 species of fish and a number of indigenous communities.

PANTANAL BOLIVIANO, BOLIVIA 3.2 million hectares

7 This vast complex of rivers, lakes, lagoons, marshes and flooded forests across the Paraguay River watershed is part of the world's largest tropical wetland, the Pantanal. It supports an astonishing array of fish, birds and mammals and provides vital ecosystem services to local communities and distant cities. WWF is working to

secure a sustainable future for the Pantanal.

LAGUNAS ALTOANDINAS Y PUNENAS DE CATAMARCA, ARGENTINA 1.2 million hectares

8 This high-altitude site in the Andes – all of it is above 3,000 – includes brackish and hypersaline lakes. Home to endemic species such as the Andean cat and Andean flamingo, there is growing concern over flamingo egg collection.

ILI RIVER DELTA AND SOUTH LAKE BALKHASH, KAZAKHSTAN 976,600 hectares

9 The largest remaining natural delta on an inland lake in Central Asia provides habitats for more than 770 species of desert flora and fauna, and over 70,000 birds. It is also an important fishery. The government and WWF are cooperating to reintroduce tigers to this area – 70 years after they went extinct in the country.

DALAI LAKE NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE, CHINA 740,000 hectares

10 Most of this arid steppe wetland is still in its natural condition. It plays a central role in flood storage, sediment retention, groundwater recharge and regional climate regulation. A key stop on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, it is important for nearly 300 bird species, while providing an annual harvest of 10,000 tonnes of fish.

USING WETLANDS WISELY

Many Ramsar sites safeguard wetlands that are intimately entwined with the livelihoods and cultural beliefs of local communities and indigenous people.

TARAPOTO LAKES COMPLEX, COLOMBIA

1 There are 22 indigenous communities living in this northern Amazonian site, which harbours over 1,500 plant and animal species, including threatened species like manatee, black caiman, jaguar and river dolphins. The Ticuna, Yagua and Cocama indigenous communities all supported the designation, which followed ten years of work between the communities, WWF, the Omacha Foundation and the government. Wise use management under Ramsar offers the communities a sustainable long-term future.

ZONES HUMIDES DE L'ONILAHY, MADAGASCAR

2 Along this protected 75km stretch of the Onilahy river, resource-dependent local communities have been supported to build sustainable livelihoods centred on ecotourism as the site boasts a large number of endemic species.

BAROMBI MBO CRATER LAKE, CAMEROON

3 Rich in endemic fish species, Lake Barombi Mbo is an important sacred site for the Barombi people. Their social and cultural life is intimately linked to the use of the lake's resources, and to farming the surrounding land.

RESERVA ECOLÓGICA DE MANGLARES CAYAPAS-MATAJE, ECUADOR

4 Globally recognised as a conservation priority for its high biodiversity, this site on the Pacific coast is a complex of estuaries, mangroves,

marshes and forests. Local Afro-Ecuadorian communities are involved in fishing, gathering mussels and crustaceans, subsistence agriculture and – in an encouraging sign for the future – ecotourism. But the site is threatened by the expansion of commercial shrimp fisheries and crop plantations.

SISTEMA LAGUNAR DE TISMA, NICARAGUA

5 Along with supporting numerous species of migratory bird, the lakes, marshes and rivers along the northwest shore of Lake Nicaragua supply water for cattle and rice cultivation, recharge and purify the groundwater, and provide flood control. Local communities rely on meat, fish and plant fibres from the site.

WASUR NATIONAL PARK, INDONESIA

6 The so-called 'Serengeti of Papua' is home to over 350 birds, including the rare Fly River Grassbird, and 111 species of fish. They co-exist with 14 villages of Kanume, Marind, Marori Men-Gey and Yei indigenous people, who depend on the wetlands for their food and daily needs. Sacred sites reflect its spiritual significance. Poaching and alien invasive species, like water hyacinth, pose increasing threats.

ESTRELLA FLUVIAL DE INIRIDA, COLOMBIA

7 This is a unique area as its flooded forests belong to the Amazon biome while its 'whitewater', 'blackwater' and 'clearwater' hydrological ecosystems are characteristic of the Orinoco River. It boasts almost 2000 species, including

a staggering 476 fish species. It's also culturally important for the Puinave, Curripaco, Piapoco and Piaroa indigenous communities, who rely on the wetlands for their livelihoods.

BUSANGA SWAMPS, ZAMBIA

8 This site has local and traditional importance due to fables arising from a famous baobab tree. It also provides local communities with fish, particularly tilapia, and tourist-based livelihoods due to the presence of lion, cheetah and numerous birds, including the vulnerable wattled crane.

MURCHISON FALLS-ALBERT DELTA WETLAND SYSTEM, UGANDA

9 As well as being an important habitat for waterbirds like shoebills and pelicans, this Ramsar site is of social, cultural and economic importance to local communities. The delta is an important spawning and breeding ground for Lake Albert fisheries, which provide a livelihood for many families, while the famous Murchison falls on the White Nile are a major tourist attraction.

CUYABENO-LAGARTOCOA-YASUNI COMPLEX, ECUADOR

10 Formed by hundreds of rivers, swamps and lagoons, the 770,000 hectare site is central to the lives of communities from six of Ecuador's indigenous groups – Cofán, Kichwa, Huaorani, Shuar, Secoyas and Sionas – who depend directly on its natural resources. Fish like paiche and catfish form a key part of their diet, while the moriche palm, which grows in flooded areas, provides important resources.

"THE DESIGNATION OF THE TARAPOTO LAKES AS A RAMSAR SITE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO STRENGTHEN, PROTECT AND CONSERVE OUR NATURAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES"

LILIA JAVA, INDIGENOUS LEADER



10 BEACONS OF BIODIVERSITY

Around 40 per cent of the world's species live in wetlands. Protecting and restoring wetlands are critical to halting and then reversing the overall decline in global biodiversity.

BITA RIVER, COLOMBIA

1 This is the largest of Colombia's 11 Ramsar sites and one of very few globally to protect an entire free flowing river. More than 660km in length, the Bita is home to an astonishing array of species comprising at least 1,474 plants, 254 fish, 201 birds, 63 mammals and 30 amphibians. These include such iconic animals as river dolphins, blue arowana, charapa turtles and jaguars.

CUYABENO-LAGARTOCOA-YASUNI COMPLEX, ECUADOR

2 Ecuador's largest Ramsar site even leaves the Bita river in the shade, boasting around 1,500 plants, 600 birds, 200 amphibians and reptiles, and 167 mammals. It is also a key refuge for threatened aquatic mammals such as the Amazonian manatee, giant otters and river dolphins.

L'ARCHIPEL DES ÎLES BARREN, MADAGASCAR

3 The site's productive ecosystems support extraordinary biodiversity, including 39 coral genera, 5 threatened turtle species, 8 threatened shark species and the critically endangered coelacanth.

BELENE ISLANDS COMPLEX, BULGARIA

4 These 10 islands on the River Danube are exceptionally biodiverse, hosting several rare plant species, including the white waterlily and the water shamrock, as well as globally threatened species of birds such as the Dalmatian pelican and great bustard. The critically endangered Russian sturgeon spawns in the complex, which has benefited from large-scale wetland restoration conducted by WWF and partners.

LAKE BUIR, MONGOLIA

5 Encompassing the largest lake in Eastern Mongolia and part of the Amur river basin, this site protects one of the main grazing areas for the Mongolian gazelle, and hosts more than 236 resident and migratory birds species. Many species of flora and fauna are listed by IUCN, making it very important for biogeographical biodiversity.

LAKE NIASA, MOZAMBIQUE

6 Covering the Mozambican section of one of Africa's Rift Valley lakes, this site boasts remarkable biodiversity with an astonishingly high percentage of endemic fish species, including hundreds of cichlids. It is also an important way point for migratory birds and protects populations of leopard, sable and elephant.

BEESHAZARI AND ASSOCIATED LAKES, NEPAL

7 The community forests within this Ramsar site are critical wildlife corridors and provide vital habitat for globally threatened species, such as tigers, Greater one-horned rhino and White-rumped vulture. In addition, these biodiverse areas shelter 32 species of mammals, 329 bird species and 199 species of plant.

LAKE MBURO-NAKIVALI WETLAND SYSTEM, UGANDA

8 Sitting at the convergence of two biological zones, this site protects a unique system of open and wooded savanna, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and lakes – and high biodiversity. It supports endangered species of birds, such as the Papyrus Yellow Warbler and Shoebill, and two endangered cichlid fish species.

MANA POOLS, ZIMBABWE

9 These four large permanent pools formed by the meandering Zambezi River are surrounded by healthy forests of mahogany, wild fig, acacia and baobab trees, which provide nesting habitats for many birds of prey. Also a World Heritage Site, it boasts significant populations of elephants, lions, hippos, crocodiles, buffalo and leopard, among many others mammals.

HARIKE WETLAND, INDIA

10 Located at the confluence of Beas and Sutlej rivers, this man-made wetland forms an important part of the only habitat of the Indus River dolphin in India. It also supports gharials, freshwater turtles and Smooth-coated otters as well as 450 species of birds, including large numbers of migratory waterbirds, such as Red-crested, Ferruginous and Common pochard.





5 ECONOMIC ENGINES

Protecting and wisely using vital wetland ecosystems is the best way of supporting local economies and driving sustainable development

LAKE NAIVASHA, KENYA

1 High in the Rift Valley, Lake Naivasha is a tourist hotspot with 350 bird species to keep the birdwatchers happy as well as hundreds of hippos and other mammals. But Kenya is also one of the world's leading flower exporters and 75% of its cut flowers are grown around Naivasha. WWF has been a driving force in improving water management in the area, working with communities, companies and the authorities to secure sustainable water supplies for people and nature.

TRAM CHIM, VIETNAM

2 WWF began working with the government and communities to restore wetlands in Tram Chim in 2007, five years before it became the first Ramsar site in the Mekong Delta. Along with improvements in the health of this section of the 'Plain of Reeds' and increases in biodiversity, local communities

have benefited significantly from sustainable use of natural resources and ecotourism - showing conservation and economic development can advance hand in hand.

LAKE CHAD, CAMEROON/ CHAD/ NIGER/NIGERIA

3 The Lake Chad basin supports more than 20 million people, including 150,000 fishermen. It is the only Ramsar site to be shared by four different countries. WWF assisted all four of them to protect their portion of the lake and surrounding wetlands which provide water, economically important fish and other resources for local communities. However, the receding lake and wetlands are under severe threat.

LAKE CLUSTER, POKHARA VALLEY, NEPAL

4 This recently designated Ramsar site is a prime



destination for foreign tourists, around 40% of whom flock to Pokhara, helping to power the local economy. The nine lakes and community forests also provide many vital ecosystem services to the local population, while about half the land area is rice paddies. Future development plans recognise that long-term prosperity relies on the natural integrity of the site and the health of its lakes and other wetlands.

KAFUE FLATS, ZAMBIA

5 The Kafue flats are critical to the economy of Zambia as they support productive agriculture and fisheries, and provide almost half of the water for the capital, Lusaka. More than half of the country's hydroelectricity, which powers the economy, comes from the Kafue Gorge Dam.



5 DIVERSE DELTAS

Boasting incredible biodiversity as well as rich fisheries and agricultural land, protecting deltas is crucial for people and nature, especially as the world warms and seas rise. WWF supported the creation of these sites and is working to enhance the resilience of deltas around the world.



ZAMBEZI RIVER DELTA, MOZAMBIQUE

1 One of the most diverse and productive deltas in the world, this vast mosaic of tropical grassland, woodland, swamps and mangroves is home to Africa's most iconic wildlife (lions, elephants, hippos), a wealth of waterbirds (pelicans, fish eagles, endangered Grey crowned cranes), and masses of fish. Keeping the delta healthy is vital for food security and sustainable development, coastal protection, flood control and carbon sequestration.

shrimps and birds, this Ramsar site also covers coastal seas inhabited by dolphins and humpback whales. The site is also rich in archaeological and religious heritage, while around a million people live within its boundaries, depending largely on fishing.

DANUBE DELTA, ROMANIA

3 The second-largest – and best-preserved – of Europe's river deltas, this Ramsar site protects many dynamic and diverse wetland habitats, which support 330 species of birds and 45 species of freshwater fish. Severe mismanagement in the 1980s degraded much of the delta, but tens of thousands of hectares have now been restored along the river basin thanks to the work of WWF and others. Agriculture, fishing

and forestry remain vital to local livelihoods, but ecotourism is becoming increasingly important, providing new opportunities for sustainable development.

SHANGHAI YANGTZE ESTUARINE WETLAND NATURE RESERVE FOR CHINESE STURGEON, CHINA

4 These wetlands in the estuarine area of the Yangtze River, the third longest in the world, support 332 fish species, including some economically important species. They provide habitat for the critically endangered Chinese paddlefish and Chinese sturgeon, which WWF is working to conserve.

Continued deposition of mud and sand within the site helps to maintain the level of the water table and purify water.

HUMEDAL DELTA DEL CAUTO, CUBA

5 The largest delta in Cuba is an intricate system of stunningly beautiful estuaries, lagoons, marshes and mangroves. Still largely undisturbed, it's a refuge for many endangered animals and birds, including the Cuban parakeet and Cuban tree-duck, as well as four species of mangroves. The site contributes significantly to important fisheries in the Gulf of Guacanayabo.



10 PARADISES FOR BIRDS

Wetlands are essential for vast numbers of resident and migratory bird species. WWF is expanding its conservation work along both the Central Asian and East Asian-Australasian Flyways.

WADDEN SEA, NETHERLANDS

1 Between the mainland and the barrier islands, these extensive tidal mudflats, salt marshes, reclaimed polders and dune systems are internationally important for many threatened species, including the Avocet and Sandwich tern. Millions of migratory birds rely on them for temporary stopovers routes or as wintering grounds.

BEMANEVKA WETLAND, MADAGASCAR

2 Comprising dense mountainous tropical rainforest, grasslands, marshes, lakes and rivers, this site provides a habitat for 106 species of birds. Many are threatened such as the Malagasy pond heron and Madagascar serpent-eagle, while one – the critically endangered Madagascar pochard – was first discovered here as recently as 2006.

RESERVA BIOLÓGICA LIMONCOCHA, ECUADOR

3 The rich tapestry of habitats, including swamps, seasonally flooded forests and wet tropical forest provide a home for over 340 bird species – so

birdwatching is very popular. It also supports a large variety of fish and turtles.

LIVANJSKO POLJE, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

4 This seasonally-flooded karst basin – perhaps the largest in the world – provides winter habitat for up to 70,000 waterbirds, which is a rare concentration for the region. It is also home to the most southerly breeding pairs of Eurasian cranes.

KUT TING MARSHLAND, THAILAND

5 Key Mekong basin wetland types characterise this site, including flooded agricultural land, and support at least 54 species of birds, among which is the endangered Baer's Pochard.

PRESPA LAKES, GREECE, ALBANIA

6 These two interconnected lakes support 272 species of birds, including the world's largest breeding colony of Dalmatian pelicans, accounting for 20% of the global

population. Pygmy cormorants, glossy ibis, and six species of herons are also present, along with a dazzling array of butterflies.

LAC ICHKEUL NATIONAL PARK, TUNISIA

7 The last great freshwater lake of a chain that once stretched the length of North Africa, this site constitutes an indispensable stop-over for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds, including species of global concern such as the White-

headed, Ferruginous and Marbled ducks. It is threatened by reduced water supply and increased grazing.

HUBEI WANG LAKE, CHINA

8 The shallow inland lakes, flooded marshes and permanent rivers support 167 bird species, including the vulnerable Serow and the Lesser white-fronted goose, and are an important stopover and wintering ground for up to 50,000 birds on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

INDIA, CHILIKA LAKE

9 This brackish lake, separated from the Bay of Bengal by a long sandy ridge, provides an important breeding, wintering and staging area for 33 waterbird species. Placed on the Montreux Record of sites of concern in 1993, Chilika Lake was subject to a Ramsar Advisory Mission in 2001 and after rehabilitation efforts was removed from the Record.

INNER NIGER DELTA, MALI

10 The largest inland wetland in West Africa, this site is a refuge for migratory birds, hosting more than 350 species. Each year more than 1 million birds fly in from more than 80 countries to use the delta.



CRITICAL FOR CITIES

Sustainable, resilient cities depend on healthy wetlands for their water supplies and food production, and to mitigate the impacts of extreme floods and storms.

SISTEMA LACRUSTE DE CHINGAZA, COLOMBIA

1 Not only does this high Andean Ramsar site have ancient ceremonial significance, it provides a home for more than 900 species of animals and plants. And it could hardly be more important: Colombia relies on these wetlands to supply water to its capital city, Bogota.

EAST KOLKATA WETLANDS, INDIA

2 Who needs concrete waste water treatment plants when you have healthy wetlands? Not the Indian city of Kolkata, which treats much of its sewage by filtering it through these Ramsar wetlands. They also produce 10,000 tonnes of fish each year and 150 tonnes of vegetables every day, providing livelihoods for around 100,000 people. And they act as a giant sponge, helping to mitigate the impact of floods on this low-lying city.

LAKE CHIVERO AND MANYAME RECREATIONAL PARK, ZIMBABWE

3 These Ramsar wetlands are probably the most valuable protected areas in the country: not because they harbour Africa's Big 5 but because they are the main source of water for the capital, Harare. However, they also provide an ideal breeding and feeding ground for more than 400 bird species and the surrounding Miombo woodlands shelter White rhinos and pangolin.

CHONGMING DONGTAN NATURE RESERVE, SHANGHAI, CHINA

4 Rich in natural resources, the largest estuarine alluvial island in the world holds the only remaining natural mudflat on the Yangtze estuary – and is vital to the nearby megacity of Shanghai. As well as being a store of considerable biodiversity –

vast flocks of waterfowl visit every year – the wetland enriches soil, purifies water, protects the coast from erosion, and resists storm surges.

LAGUNE DE GHAR EL MELH ET DELTA DE LA MEJERD, TUNISIA

5 Rich in culture and biodiversity, Ghar el Melh was one of the first candidates for Ramsar Wetland City Accreditation. Its Wetland Education Centre was established with support from WWF and details the social, economic and environmental importance of the country's wetlands. The Ramsar site itself is an ancient sea bay that is now almost totally filled with sediment. Local communities still practise artisanal fishing and traditional small-scale agriculture.

6



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MAI PO AND INNER DEEP BAY, HONG KONG

The Mai Po Nature Reserve is one of Hong Kong's greatest natural treasures. Located across the bay from the megacity of Shenzhen, the 377-hectare area of brackish coastal wetlands supports over 400 bird species, including around 10% of the world's remaining Black faced spoonbills.

WWF-Hong Kong has actively managed the reserve in cooperation with government since 1983 with the aim of increasing biodiversity, enhancing resilience and promoting the reserve for educational and research purposes. Since 1990, around 4,700 local and international researchers and forestry commission officers have attended our professional wetland management courses at Mai Po. Every year, around 12,000 school students and youth take part in education programmes developed around citizen science and experiential learning. It is also open to the public and visitors can join WWF guided tours of the reserve.

WWF field staff manage the traditional 'gei wai' shrimp ponds on the reserve to ensure various habitats and food sources for migratory birds since the Mai Po and Inner Deep Bay Ramsar site is a key point on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway – with up to 90,000 waterbirds wintering on the site.





6 SALTWATER SITES

People often forget that maintaining the integrity of critical coastal wetlands, including mangrove forests and reefs, is a central aspect of Ramsar's mission

QOLIQOLI COKOVATA, GREAT SEA REEF, FIJI

1 Fiji's Great Sea Reef is the world's third largest continuous barrier reef system, and Qoliqoli Cokovata is at its very heart. Covering over 134,000 hectares, its coral, seagrass beds and mangroves sustain huge biodiversity, including populations of globally threatened hawksbill, leatherback, loggerhead and green turtles. It also plays a central role in the food security and livelihoods of local communities, who collectively retain custodial ownership over the fishing grounds. Designated in 2018 after years of joint work by communities, WWF and the government, the reef faces a variety of threats, such as climate change, chemical and waste water run-off from a neighbouring urban settlement and sugar cane farms.

BAIXADA MARANHENSE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AREA, BRAZIL

2 This sparsely-populated area of low, seasonally flooded

lands along the north-east coast of Brazil is mostly comprised of fields, gallery forests and mangrove swamps. The site is an important centre of biodiversity for both waterfowl and fish. Mangrove deforestation and urban development are growing threats.

MANGROVES DE TSIRIBIHINA, MADAGASCAR

3 Local communities help with sustainable resource management in this site at the mouth of the Tsiribihina River. Habitats include lagoons, sandbanks, salt and mud flats, marshes and dry land, along with some 20,000 hectares of mangrove forest. These provide a home for more than 40,000 waterbirds, including 44 species on the IUCN Red List.

LAGUNA DE TÉRMINOS, MÉXICO

4 The largest coastal lagoon on the Mexican shore of the Gulf of Mexico contains around 127,000 hectares of mangrove forests, which produce as much as 716,000 tonnes of dead

leaves each year. Iconic species include the Jabiru stork and the Horseshoe stork. 100,000 people live on in the port city of Ciudad del Carmen, which sits on the lagoon's barrier island.

PORT LAUNAY COASTAL WETLANDS, SEYCHELLES

5 Situated on the main island of Mahé, this site contains all seven of the region's mangrove species. As well as providing an ideal habitat for fish, the mangroves stabilise the shoreline.

ARCHIPEL ET DUNES D'ESSAOUIRA, MOROCCO

6 This site protects an important archipelago on Morocco's Atlantic coast as well as sand dunes, beaches and rocky outcrops. It hosts a number of endemic plant, reptile and amphibian species as well as up to 10% of the global population of Eleonora's Falcon. Greek, Phoenician and Roman remnants dotted around the archipelago illustrate the site's archaeological significance.



“WE APPROVED THE NOMINATION OF LARGE PARTS OF THE GREAT SEA REEF AS A RAMSAR SITE TO PROTECT IT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. I APPEAL TO EVERY SINGLE PERSON ON EARTH TO HELP US. WE MUST REPLACE THE PRESENT CULTURE OF ABUSE WITH A CULTURE OF CARE.”

FIJI PRIME MINISTER,
FRANK BAINIMARAMA



10 WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

Some of the world's most extraordinary and most endangered species can be found in wetland habitats

COELACANTH: REEF BARRIER OF NOSY VE ANDROKA, MADAGASCAR

1 Thought to have become extinct in the late Cretaceous period, the coelacanth was 'rediscovered' in 1938: a living fossil. This site provides a habitat for the critically endangered West Indian Ocean coelacanth.

INDUS DOLPHIN: INDUS DOLPHIN RESERVE, PAKISTAN

2 This 170km stretch of Indus river is home to the vast majority of the 1800 remaining Indus river dolphins. WWF has

worked with partners for decades to conserve the 'blind dolphin' and its numbers are now inching upwards.

VERREAUX'S SIFAKA: COMPLEXE DES LACS AMBONDRO ET SIRAVE, MADAGASCAR

3 This diverse site is home to the endangered Verreaux's sifaka, a lemur with thick, silky white fur and the habit of hopping on two legs when it occasionally heads down to the ground.

JULIMES PUPFISH: MANANTIALES GEOTERMALES DE JULIMES, MEXICO

4 The water in the geothermal springs in the Chihuahuan desert reaches temperatures of 45°C and hosts the entire known population of the endangered Julimes pupfish – as well as its only food source, a tiny snail.

ORANGE-WINGED DROPWING: WADI WURAYA NP, UAE

5 In such an arid region, a unique hydrogeological system creates freshwater streams, pools and waterfalls: rare habitats for many species, including dragonflies.

OTTER: LAGO DI SAN GIULIANO, ITALY

6 The lake and stream in the Bradano river basin is a rare refuge in Italy for one of the country's rarest mammals: the otter.

WOLVERINE: KOPPÅNGEN, SWEDEN

7 This remote wetland area of small lakes, peatlands and spruce forests is rich in mammals, including the rarely seen wolverine.

SNOW LEOPARD: GOKYO AND ASSOCIATED LAKE, NEPAL

8 High in the Himalayas with a view of Mount Everest, this site is prime habitat for the majestic – and vulnerable – snow leopard.

PIRARUCU: COMPLEJO DE HUMEDALES DE LAGOS DE TARAPOTO, COLOMBIA

9 This diverse site harbours one of the world's largest freshwater fish, the pirarucu, which breathes air so has to come to surface regularly to gulp air.

TAPIR: SISTEMA LACRUSTE DE CHINGAZA, COLOMBIA

10 This complex of lagoons and cloud forests provides a habitat for the South American tapir.





7 WETLANDS WORTH PROTECTING

Among many others. It is vital to continue expanding the network of Ramsar protected sites to slow the destruction of the world's most important wetlands. WWF would happily help countries to urgently designate the following:

UPPER SEPIK RIVER BASIN, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

1 Covering 7.7 million hectares, this is among the largest and most intact freshwater basins in the Asia Pacific region. Its diverse habitats are a global biodiversity hotspot, and shelter many threatened species – as well as supporting local livelihoods. WWF has supported work to prepare the Upper Sepik River Basin for designation.

SMALL MEDITERRANEAN ISLAND WETLANDS

2 There are more than 14,000 wetlands on the islands of the Mediterranean, but despite their diversity and uniqueness only 27 have been designated as Ramsar sites so far. As development pressures mount, action must be taken to protect more of these internationally important areas.

OMO WETLAND, KENYA/ETHIOPIA

3 This area is home to incredible biodiversity, from

birds to endemic fish and a large population of Nile crocodiles. The wetland also supports local Dassanech and Turkana communities. But Ethiopia has not yet signed up to the Convention.

LOWER KARNALI RIVER SYSTEM, NEPAL

4 Ramsar designation of the Lower Karnali River in Nepal would help to protect its endangered Ganges river dolphins, as well as Mahseer fish, crocodiles and numerous bird species.

NATIONAL CHAMBAL SANCTUARY, INDIA

5 Critically endangered gharials inhabit the Chambal River, along with Ganges river dolphins, the Indian narrow-headed soft-shelled turtle, the Three-striped roofed turtle, the freshwater whip ray and more than 300 bird species.

TONLE SAP LAKE, CAMBODIA

6 Local communities are generally very supportive of the potential Ramsar designation of the largest and most important lake in the Mekong River basin. Tonle Sap provides a wealth of ecosystem services and livelihoods for communities.

MARA/KIRUMI WETLAND, TANZANIA/KENYA

7 WWF is working on the ground to conserve this wetland area that's vital for water quality in Lake Victoria and its resident Nile perch and tilapia. It filters sediments and waste from upstream mining areas and provides a unique habitat for birds, hippos and crocodiles.



10 REALLY IMPORTANT RESOLUTIONS

Like all Conventions, Ramsar has passed a plethora of resolutions over the years, some more critical than others. WWF has worked with Contracting Parties to secure the adoption of many vital ones at recent CoPs to enhance the conservation impact of the Convention. And we remain committed to working with Parties, IOPs and the Secretariat to strengthen Ramsar.

1. Report of the World Commission on Dams and its relevance to the Ramsar Convention – Res.VIII.2
2. Promoting sustainable investment by the public and private sectors to ensure the maintenance of the benefits people and nature gain from wetlands – Res.XI.20
3. Recognizing Wetlands of International Importance for their traditional cultural values – Res.IX.22
4. Wetlands and extractive industries – Res.X.26
5. An integrated framework and guidelines for avoiding, mitigating and compensating for wetland losses – Res.XI.9
6. Principles for the planning and management of urban and peri-urban wetlands – Res.XI.11
7. Wetland City Accreditation of the Ramsar Convention – Res.XII.10
8. Call to action to ensure and protect the water requirements of wetlands for the present and the future – Res.XII.12
9. Conservation of Mediterranean Basin island wetlands – Res. XII.14
10. Evaluation of the management and conservation effectiveness of Ramsar Sites – Res.XII.15



MEDISWET: FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

Back in 2004, when a small project on the island wetlands of Greece was launched by WWF, nobody could have predicted that it would be replicated at a wider scale.

But 11 years later, the 'Conservation of Mediterranean Basin island wetlands' resolution was unanimously adopted at the Ramsar CoP12 in Uruguay and since then significant steps have been taken to implement it.

In 2017, 13 partners from 9 Mediterranean countries - including WWF offices in Greece, the Balkans, North Africa, Spain and Turkey – joined forces under the MedIsWet project to document the existence and values of Mediterranean island wetlands, promote restoration, and advocate for their protection at national and Mediterranean level.

MedIsWet is a perfect example of how Ramsar resolutions can be taken up and implemented by small NGOs and IOPs in cooperation with national governments and how small-scale projects can be expanded to reach a substantial scale. First it was Greece, now it's the Mediterranean Basin, tomorrow we are hoping - and working to ensure – it will be island wetlands of the globe.

“BUILDING UP FROM THE SUCCESSFUL NEW METHODOLOGY FOR WETLAND INVENTORY IN THE GREEK ISLANDS, MEDISWET IS NOW UPSCALING IN THE WHOLE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN FOR THE IDENTIFICATION, PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF WETLANDS. IN ADDITION, IT IS BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF CONSERVATION ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE FOR WETLANDS IN THE REGION.”

LUIS COSTA, PROGRAMME MANAGER, MEDITERRANEAN BASIN, MAVA FOUNDATION

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT RAMSAR SITES

Along with our ongoing conservation work on the ground, partnerships with communities, companies and Contracting Parties, and policy work, WWF is also promoting new ways of tackling the huge challenges to the world's most important wetlands.

WATER RESERVES

1 A long term, pioneering approach, where 12 years of close cooperation with Mexico's National Water Commission finally saw a major result in June 2018 as the President of Mexico signed a series of landmark decrees establishing water reserves in nearly 300 river basins. The decrees will guarantee water supplies for the next 50 years for 45 million people, as well as some of Mexico's most biodiverse ecosystems and globally important wetland protected areas, including 64 Ramsar sites. The Water Reserves approach is now being rolled out to other Latin American countries as part of a major WWF Freshwater Initiative.

CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION

2 After three years of close coordination initiated at Ramsar COP12 in Uruguay and with support from WWF, leaders from Brazil, Paraguay, and Bolivia gathered at the 8th World Water Forum in Brasilia in 2018 and publicly committed to a joint strategy for the sustainable development and conservation of the Pantanal – the world's largest tropical wetland. By advancing a joint agenda, the three countries expect that the landmark agreement will help prevent degradation of this priceless wetland, while ensuring equitable economic and social development.

At the signing ceremony, Bolivia's Minister of the Environment proclaimed, "Today, Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay are just one country, one brotherhood, one Pantanal."

DAM REMOVAL AND RESTORATION

3 The Haringvliet used to be the most important mouth of the Meuse and Rhine rivers, with a highly productive ecosystem. It was the entrance and exit for iconic migratory fish, like sturgeon and salmon. But when the mouth was closed off from the sea by the Haringvliet dam in 1971, the rich estuarine ecosystem rapidly deteriorated.

But now things are changing. In 2018, the dam will be opened (a little) by the Dutch government and six large Dutch conservation organizations, including WWF, have joined forces to maximise this historic opportunity. By working together, they aim to bring the estuary back to life and see migratory fish and birds return, while also benefiting the local economy and quality of life.





4

4 The Living Danube Partnership is a unique, cross-sectoral partnership that brings together WWF, the Coca-Cola Foundation and the Coca-Cola system as well as the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River to promote the conservation of wetlands in the basin. The seven-year partnership seeks to restore vital wetlands, rivers and floodplains along the Danube and its tributaries, aiming to increase the river's capacity by the equivalent of 4,800 Olympic sized swimming pools and restore over 7,400 football pitches' worth of wetland habitat by 2020. The partnership is working closely with local stakeholders and relevant authorities to reconnect river stretches or floodplains to the river system by opening dams, installing sluices for water retention or improving water supply channels. At the same time, a regional movement is being created for wetland conservation and restoration, as well as good water stewardship.

5 Zambia's Kafue Flats contain a vast expanse of floodplains, grasslands, woodland zones

and geothermal areas that are rich in biodiversity, including the endemic Kafue Lechwe. They are also critical to the country's economy. With these valuable wetlands facing a variety of threats, including pollution from agriculture and industry, WWF is turning to innovative Bankable Water Solutions to create an attractive investment structure through which blended finance can flow to support projects that produce a return while enhancing the condition of the wetlands. Through this approach, bankable solutions

can help resolve tradeoffs between infrastructure development and conservation in the Kafue, and ultimately shift investment decisions so that they recognize and support river values up front, before these values are lost to poorly planned infrastructure or water pollution.

6 Big banks are finally starting to understand the importance of Ramsar wetlands – and the urgent need to stop funding their destruction. Barclays was the first to change its public policy, stating

that it would no longer fund harmful projects in Ramsar sites. It was rapidly followed by Standard Chartered, which went a step further, announcing that it would “not provide financial services to clients that have operations that are located within, or significantly impact negatively upon wetlands designated under the Ramsar Convention”. Hopefully, other global financial institutions will now follow suit. WWF will keep reminding them.

5



WWF has supported numerous countries to sign up to the Ramsar Convention and to designate their first Wetlands of International Importance.

1 This was the first Ramsar site that WWF actively helped to establish and the first in Cuba. It's the largest and best preserved wetland in the Caribbean, with outstanding natural and cultural value.

2 North Korea is Ramsar's newest member, joining in 2018 with the support of several partners including WWF. Mundok harbours half the world's population of threatened Swan goose.

3 After years of close cooperation with the Ramsar Secretariat and the government, Zimbabwe designated its first seven sites simultaneously, stretching from the Victoria Falls to Lake Chieveley, which supplies the capital with water.

4 WWF played a central role in the rehabilitation and designation of Cameroon's first Ramsar site. This 600,000 hectare site is home to a huge concentration of wildlife and more than 100,000 people – all of whom depend on the wetlands remaining healthy and productive.

5 This vast site – comprising 1.3 million hectares of flooded savanna, coastal dunes, swamps, miombo forest, mangroves and seagrass beds – supports a wealth of terrestrial, freshwater and marine wildlife and thousands of farming and fishing families.

6 Another early success for WWF was the accession of Nigeria in 2001 and the designation of Nguru Lake, which is particularly important for fish, waterfowl and recharging groundwater.

7 Along with conserving its rich mangrove forests, Seychelle's first site has become a centre for environmental education, spreading awareness of why wetlands (and mangroves) matter.

8 The small island state of Palau joined Ramsar with the designation of its largest freshwater body in 2003. Besides supporting endemic fish, threatened estuarine crocodiles, and the national bird, the Palau fruit dove, the site also helps control floods and maintain water quality.

9 These three small crater lakes in the central highlands of the main island of Upolu are still in a near-pristine state. Lake Lanoto'o feeds the headwaters of the Fulusau river system, the main water source for the city of Apia. It also supports endemic Samoan bird species, such as the endangered Tooth-billed pigeon and the Mao.

10 WWF worked closely with the Bhutanese government to designate its first three sites in 2012. They are the main wintering grounds of the migratory Black-necked cranes. Snow leopards and tigers live in Bumdeling, while Gangtey-Phobji is a growing centre for nature-based tourism.

Boasting 50 Ramsar sites – more than any other in Africa – Algeria developed its first comprehensive approach to the sustainable utilization of its diverse wetlands in 2017. With financial and technical support from UNDP and WWF, the strategy was the culmination of a five-year process, which involved securing the endorsement of every provincial government.



CONCLUSION

In 2021, the Ramsar Convention will celebrate its 50th birthday, while WWF will turn 60. As this report shows, decades of collaboration and cooperation have achieved some extraordinary results.

Ramsar now boasts the world's largest network of protected areas, almost half of which were designated by countries with support from WWF.

But the world's wetlands continue to be degraded and destroyed – rivers and reefs, marshes and mangroves, swamps and seagrass beds. And with them our hopes of a sustainable future. If current trends continue, there will not be much to celebrate in 2021.

Healthy wetlands are an integral part of the solutions to many of humanity's most pressing problems and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. From mitigating climate change to feeding our growing population, from reversing the loss of biodiversity to supplying water to our megacities – we can only tackle these huge challenges by halting the destruction and degradation of the world's wetlands. But they continue to be undervalued and overlooked.

Most Ramsar sites still face serious threats, let alone the more than 80 per cent of wetlands that are not yet designated as Ramsar sites.

So it's time for everyone to redouble their efforts. While there are a wide array of actions that countries may take to improve their efforts, we believe that three are key to delivering significant impacts:

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONTRACTING PARTIES

Prioritize

However much we would like to, there is no way to protect all the world's wetlands: there will need to be tradeoffs. This will involve hard decisions. Countries will need to prioritize – basing their decisions on the values of their most important wetlands and their potential contribution to commitments under the SDGs, Convention on

Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement on climate change

Commit

Countries need to commit fully to their Ramsar sites – both new and old. Designating a site means more than drawing some lines on a map and giving them a Ramsar number: it's essential that new and existing sites are protected in practice as well as on paper. WWF believes it is critical to bolster the Ramsar Advisory Missions (RAMs), which help countries identify and address the wetland challenges they face. These missions are a critical tool and have proven effective in the past. RAMs need to be strengthened, supported, given adequate resources, and utilized by countries – as well as recommended by NGOs – to help ensure the ecological character of the world's most important wetlands is maintained so that they continue to deliver benefits to both people and nature.

Innovate and Partner

Along with traditional on-the-ground protection, countries need to consider innovative approaches to securing wetlands. These could include rethinking investments that negatively impact Ramsar sites and seizing the opportunities offered by bankable water solutions to protect our wetlands. Corporate water stewardship also provides an opportunity to explore partnerships and creates a space for the private sector to come on board as a key partner for wetland protection.

WWF remains fully committed to Ramsar and will continue to work with Contracting Parties and the other International Organization Partners to achieve more successes, specifically by:

- Demonstrating that securing wetlands under the Ramsar Convention helps countries to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change and deliver their commitments towards achieving the SDGs;

- Promoting the vital role of the Ramsar Convention and wetlands in delivering a future where people, economies and the environment thrive; and
- Ensuring that our initiatives and programmes across the world continue to demonstrate what can be achieved through the effective implementation of the Ramsar convention.

WWF's mission is to create a world where people and nature can thrive together – and this can't happen unless wetlands are understood, valued and truly protected. Without Ramsar, it's impossible. With Ramsar, we can look towards the future with hope. And perhaps in 2021 – given the necessary effort – we will read a Global Wetland Outlook with more optimistic statistics about the state of the world's wetlands. That would be great news for all the species and people that depend on them. And a perfect 50th and 60th birthday present.

100%
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110 MILLION HECTARES

of wetlands created with
support from WWF

35%

decline in wetlands in
the past four decades

40%

of world's species
live in wetlands

75

SDG indicators
link directly to
wetlands



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