



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES

CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES

(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

## PRESS RELEASE

### Congo designates three exceptional wetland areas as Ramsar Sites

**Gland, Switzerland | 16 November 2015** - The Government of Congo has recently designated three wetland areas, which provide essential habitat to a range of notable and threatened species, as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites). These are the Loubetsi-Nyanga biological reserve, the Leketi-Mbama floodplains, and the biodiversity-rich Tchikapika-Owando wetland. With these new designations Congo now has 13 Ramsar Sites within its territory, with the total surface of all the Sites covering nearly 137,000 km<sup>2</sup>. These zones make a significant contribution to the local economies by supporting water supply, fishing and agriculture. They are also of exceptional value to the region's biodiversity.

Characterized by a range of habitats including dryland gallery forests, swamp forests and river bodies, the [Loubetsi-Nyanga](#) is an important biological reserve which supports varied flora, macroinvertebrates, fish, reptiles, birds and terrestrial mammals, and provides refuge for several notable species including the forest elephant, gorilla, chimpanzee, hippopotamus, hyena, leopard, and the giant ground pangolin. The Site is also home to the Nile crocodile, African dwarf crocodile and the critically endangered slender-snouted crocodile. The local communities, estimated at 12,500 inhabitants, are highly dependent on the numerous resources of the Site for food, medicine, transportation and goods for trading with nearby towns.

The [Leketi-Mbama](#) is a unique inland wetland with a mixture of varied habitats including lakes, marshes and floodplains. It supports a wide range of animals including the critically endangered western lowland gorilla, the endangered chimpanzee, the vulnerable hippopotamus and the African elephant. Its floating meadows, savannah and swamp forests also provide a safe haven for migratory bird species, the African darter and the woolly-necked stork. Traditional agriculture, fishing, hunting and collection of non-timber forest products are some of the activities in the Site.

The [Tchikapika-Owando](#) is a biodiversity-rich wetland which supports fish, reptiles, birds, mammals, and invertebrate species and plays an important role in the hydrological regulation of the Congo river basin. The Site is known to support a multitude of species of fauna and flora, with its grassy savannah, rainforest and rural complexes particularly characteristic of the Guinean-Congolese/Zambeian biogeographic region. Notable species include the leopard, water chevrotain, forest elephant, hippopotamus, African civet, side-striped jackal, the critically endangered western gorilla, crocodiles, tortoises and reptiles. The local population depends on the resources of the Site for its livelihoods, such as traditional fishing, hunting, subsistence farming, livestock rearing, collection of non-timber forest products and medicinal plants.

## **Note to editors**

### **About the Ramsar Convention**

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the global framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is the only global treaty to focus on a single ecosystem. The Convention was signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and entered into force in 1975. Since then, 169 countries, almost 90% of UN member states from the entire world's geographic regions have acceded and become Contracting Parties.

Under this treaty, member states undertake to ensure the wise use of all the wetlands in their territory by undertaking local and national action, and collaborate internationally to maintain the ecological characteristics of wetlands. Each Contracting Party upon accession to the Convention designates at least one priority wetland site as a Wetland of International Importance because of the valuable ecosystem services they provide. These Sites are added to the network of Ramsar Sites worldwide. Currently there are over 2,200 designated Ramsar Sites globally, covering an area of 210 million hectares, an area larger than Mexico.

### **About wetlands**

The definition of the word 'wetland', under the Convention, is any land area that is saturated or flooded with water, either seasonally or permanently. Inland wetlands include aquifers, lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, peatlands, ponds, flood plains and swamps. Coastal wetlands include all coastlines, mangroves, saltmarshes, estuaries, lagoons, sea grass meadows and coral reefs.

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