

**2 February 2002  
World Wetlands Day**

**The force of culture**

**A message from the Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands  
(Ramsar, Iran, 2 February 1971)**

Music, songs, stories and oral traditions, creation myths, religious beliefs, medicinal practices, production systems, artefacts, hunting traditions, private dwellings and human settlements, you name them: the cultural expressions associated with wetlands are countless, in practically all regions of the world, spanning in many cases from prehistory to the present.

And as with all cultural components, they have been evolving for centuries - sometimes millennia - and are deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of the group, be it small or big in number. They are so blended with our "way of being" that many times we need the outsider to point them out to us, as particular characteristics of our group (and a group can be an entire nation).

This is why researching and explaining the cultural expressions associated with wetlands, and in a broader sense with water, can constitute a powerful tool for involving people in their conservation and sustainable use.

Wetlands and the human cultures associated with them can be inextricably linked, and each can benefit from actions to maintain the other. In these cases, there is a symbiosis between people and their environment: the destruction of these wetlands will represent the demise of a people, and vice versa: the destruction of a particular culture can represent, in the short or long term, the destruction of the wetlands associated with them.

But beyond the case of a clear symbiotic relationship, or a livelihood-dependence relationship, between wetlands and a people, in practically all societies we can explore the practical and immaterial connections that exist between different groups and water resources. Not for nothing does water constitute an essential element of life.

Thus, the Ramsar Convention, by focusing the celebration of World Wetlands Day this year upon the cultural values of wetlands, is entering a new avenue in its 31 years of existence, an avenue that should bring the treaty closer to people, and to more people, always with the same intent: to contribute to the safeguarding of the wetlands of this planet, because they are part of the rich and complex web of life, our life.

**Delmar Blasco  
Gland, Switzerland, 22 January 2002**