Gland, Switzerland – World Wetlands Day is being celebrated with the full recognition of Africa’s Lake Chad as a wetland of international significance, fulfilling an agreement made a decade ago by the four nations that share it.

The declaration by the Cameroon Republic that its portion of Africa’s fourth largest lake is being declared a wetland of international importance under the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands follows similar declarations by Niger and Chad (both in 2001) and Nigeria (2008).

Cameroon’s announcement will also clear the way for Lake Chad to become the largest of the world’s few recognised trans-boundary international wetlands, where countries make a formal agreement for joint protection and management of shared aquatic ecosystems and their resources.

“Lake Chad’s inscription as only the 13th transboundary formally recognised wetland is highly significant as 11 of the areas so far declared are in Europe,” said Denis Landenbergue, WWF International’s wetlands conservation manager. “Lake Chad joins the Saloum Delta shared by Senegal and Gambia as only the second such site in Africa.”

Lake Chad is the remnant of a much vaster lake known as Mega-Chad which 22,000 years ago drained a greener Sahara and was three times the size of Lake Victoria, now Africa’s largest lake. It is now the focal point of life in a huge expanse of arid Sahelian Africa. Technically best described as an inland delta, the new internationally protected wetland covers 2.6 million hectares vital to countless birds as well as endangered otters, gazelles and elephants. The Lake is also home to hippopotamuses and Nile Crocodiles.

The Lake Chad basin is home to over 20 million people with the majority dependent on the lake and other wetlands for their fishing, hunting, farming and grazing. But the Lake Chad basin is recognised as highly challenged by climate change, desertification and unsustainable management of water resources and fisheries.

“Lake Chad is one of the largest and most important of the vital watering points for migratory birds from Europe and west Asia that each year cross the Sahara and it is also where many of them stop and stay for the winter” said Landenbergue.

In another World Wetlands Day highlight, Algeria moved to designate several of the wetlands vital to many of the same migrating birds on the northern side of the Sahara. Ceremonies this Sunday in Algeria will mark the designation of five new Wetlands of International Importance for the country.

In Cameroon, adding the completing piece to the Lake Chad world wetland is but the latest of a string of Ramsar
declarations over recent years.

“From the Mangrove forests of the Ntem Estuary, curling through the crater lakes of the Cameroon Highlands and into Waza Logone flood plain and the Lake Chad basin, Cameroon’s wetlands constitute a haven for biological diversity,” said Natasha Quist, head of WWF’s Central African Regional Programme.

WWF, which partnered with the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Ramsar Convention and the Global Environment Facility on projects in Lake Chad and with the governments on achieving the declaration, said the challenge now was to “turn the promise of protection for Lake Chad into a reality for the millions that depend on it.”

World Wetlands Day celebrates the signing of one of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971 in the Caspian Sea city of Ramsar, Iran. The Convention, known generally as the Ramsar Convention, followed rising concern over the fate of migratory birds and was the first modern international environment treaty.

For further information:

Denis Landenbergue, WWF International Freshwater Programme, Manager Wetlands Conservation, tél. +41 22 364 90 29 dlandenbergue@wwfin.org

About WWF

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

Source URL: https://www.ramsar.org/news/decade-old-dream-comes-true-for-lake-chad