Improving the management of Ramsar Sites and other protected areas in Asia

1 November 2013

Asia

The effective management of Ramsar Sites and other protected areas in Asia was the focus of two recent meetings in the Philippines. Site managers discussed the challenges they face with limited capacity and resources, and also identified opportunities and tools that would help in improving site management.

The **Asian Regional Workshop on the Management of Wetlands and East Asian-Australasian Flyway Sites** was held in Manila on 24-27 September. It was attended by Ramsar Site managers from 15 countries, as well as managers from Flyway Network Sites (FNS) of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), one of the Regional Initiatives of the Ramsar Convention.

They tested and provided feedback on two site management tools. The ‘Toolkit for Ecosystem Service Site-based Assessment’ (**TESSA**), was presented by Ishana Thapa (BirdLife Nepal) as a tool to help non-specialists identify the main ecosystem services offered at a site, and evaluate their benefits. The second tool, the ‘Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool’ (**METT**), was presented by Raphael Glemet (IUCN) as a simple technique for evaluating the effectiveness of the management of protected areas. Participants welcomed the tools and Site managers recommended testing them across a wider range of Ramsar Sites.

The **4th ASEAN Heritage Parks Conference**, held in Tagaytay City on 1-4 October, brought together over 300 biodiversity experts in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, including the 33 ASEAN Heritage Parks Managers. One of these parks, the Ba Be National Park in Vietnam, is also a Ramsar Site.
The Conference included sessions on managing protected areas, integrating biodiversity values, and working with indigenous and local communities in protected areas. The METT tool was again presented, as the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and the German government’s aid agency GIZ presented the findings of a study of its effectiveness in the management of ASEAN Heritage Parks.

At both meetings, Site managers mentioned the lack of awareness of local communities as well as decision makers. ACB’s Executive Director Roberto Oliva added that designating protected areas is not enough to conserve biodiversity and ecosystems, and that the socio-economic needs of the local communities need to be addressed too. Local communities should be involved further in the co-management of the site and should also share the benefits provided by the protected area.

Invasive species, such as Opuntia stricta, constitute one of challenges Site managers face. Another speaker stated that ecosystems and protected areas had been substantially undervalued and agencies responsible for conserving them underfunded, as decision makers used to focus on the extractive value of ecosystems, ignoring the wide range of services that they provided. Thanks to the ‘The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity’ (TEEB) study, there is now greater awareness of the value of ecosystems, especially wetland ecosystems. There is therefore now a need to evaluate the range of ecosystem services provided by each individual protected area in order to attract greater political support and adequate resources for management and conservation.

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