



# Isle of Man celebrates first Ramsar site

12 September 2006

Ceremony to celebrate designation of the first Ramsar site in the Isle of Man



The Isle of Man is a crown dependency of the United Kingdom, and designated its first

site on Wednesday, September 6.

In a ceremony to mark this designation the Secretary General, Peter Bridgewater, and the Manx Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Phil Gawne, MHK, unveiled a new information plaque at the site, the Ballaugh Curragh. The UK Minister for Biodiversity was unable to be there at the last moment but sent a message of congratulation on the site's designation. The Secretary General noted that the plaque was written in both Manx and English and that this reflected the strong cultural element of the site. In Manx it is an Ynnyd Ramsar!

The site is a multi-landholder area with Manx National Heritage and the Manx Wildlife Trust, as well as the Curraghs Wildlife Park, run by the Department of Tourism and Leisure, and local landholders all forming part of the process.

The [press release from the government](#) is attached, and there was considerable press and radio interest in the designation. An announcement was made by the minister that the government of the Isle of Man has established a new programme to help farmers around the site develop their lands to be extensions of the Curragh, in terms of land managed for wildlife as well as agriculture.

-- Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General



(left to right) John Callister, Minister Phil Gawne, the Secretary General, Liz Charter (Manx DAFF) and Martin Moore, Chair, Manx National Heritage



Peter Bridgewater and Minister Phil Gawne





Flag-draped site sign







The path into Ballaugh Curragh



Royal fern





Bogbean in water-filled ditch



Embargoed until Wednesday 6th September 14.00 hours

PRESS RELEASE

Minister announces new scheme to support Ballaugh Curragh



DAFF Minister Phil Gawne MHK today announced a new scheme to support the Ballaugh Curragh, the first wildlife site on the Island to gain international recognition.

The move was revealed as the Curragh was officially declared a Ramsar wetland of international importance.

Mr Gawne said a fund of £10,000 would be made available to farmers and landowners to develop wetlands and hay meadows around the Ramsar site to encourage bird life and protect the area from any further drying out.

'It is not enough to draw a line around the site and say it is now protected', declared the Minister, 'Now it is time to make conscious decisions about the Curragh management. This incentive should assist in protecting and enhancing the Curragh.

The sign confirming the Ballaugh Curragh as a Ramsar wetland of international importance was unveiled by Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the international Ramsar organisation. The designation was welcomed and supported by Mr Gawne, by Martin Moore, Chairman of the Trustees of Manx National Heritage and by John "Dog" Callister, who is well known for his love of the Curragh.

Martin Moore said "Manx National Heritage has long supported the extension of Ramsar to the Isle of Man, and from the start identified the Ballaugh Curragh as a prime candidate for designation under that Convention. It is gratifying to see the fruition of that desire, and to congratulate the Department and the other landowners on the hard work and commitment which has brought formal designation to completion".

The site qualifies for international status in being an excellent example of wetland habitats characteristic of the Island and the region; bog pools, marshy grassland, birch woodland, modified bog and willow scrub (known as Curragh). It also has on occasions the largest numbers of winter roosting hen harriers in Western Europe and is breeding habitat for a highly endangered migratory bird, the corncrake. The corncrake, a secretive bird, was believed to have bred on Manx Wildlife Trust land this summer (the third season since 1999). Hen harriers are attractive birds of prey, which are declining in numbers in many parts of the British Isles.

Local landowners, Shirley and John Kneale welcomed the designation, saying, "We are delighted with the Ramsar designation, and congratulate the Wildlife Office and the Department for their vision and hard work. The Ballaugh Curraghs should be protected for future generations".

Peter Bridgewater, launching the event, spoke about the value of international recognition and including the site in the Ramsar list. Mr Bridgewater said "wetlands are important for their ecosystem services such as carbon stores and in the water cycle. They also play an important role in the cultural life of communities".

John Callister described his love of the Curragh and how he became interested in photography, wild plants and the Manx language. All these interests came together in his well-known walks and talks about the Curragh.

The Minister for Agriculture, Phil Gawne MHK, described the site as an important part of the Manx heritage, a sentiment echoed by Martin Moore of Manx National Heritage. Mr Gawne praised the work done by various local landowners and farmers to conserve the wetland in the past and emphasised the department's role in assisting them to conserve it in future. To support this he announced a new sum of money, £10,000, to be made available to farmers and land owners for wetland and hay meadow creation and enhancement around the Ramsar site to protect and encourage viable populations of corncrakes, lapwings and curlews.

Other partners in this project include the Manx Wildlife Trust which has several reserves in the curragh area. One reserve, Close Sartfield, is famous for its orchid walks in June when visitors can see thousands of flowers of spotted and butterfly orchids. There is also a bird hide on their reserve, from which hen harriers can be seen flying in to roost in the autumn. Another partner, the Wildlife Park, run by the Department of Tourism and Leisure, also plays an important role in enabling visitors to see the otherwise inaccessible vegetation and wildlife along their nature trail and from their tower look-out.

The third partner is Manx National Heritage which owns and has improved access to the largest part of the wetland, and which provided the sign for the unveiling ceremony.

A set of commemorative posters has been printed to mark this unique occasion. These were given to those attending the launch, to local schools and are available from DAFF at Knockaloe. These include images of the Curragh nature trail, an orchid field, tangled willow trunks and reflective pools.

## Notes for editors

1. The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat, better known as the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for international cooperation on the conservation of wetland habitats. Its broad objectives are to stem the progressive encroachment on, and loss of, wetlands and to promote their wise use. "The Convention's mission is the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world". Further information about Ramsar is available on the Ramsar website, [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

2. DAFF designated Ballaugh Curragh as an Area of Special Scientific Interest in 2005. The Ramsar designation but does not add any further legal protection, but gives the site international status. The two designation boundaries are identical.

3. Hen harriers were natural colonisers of the island in the late 70's. The population of approximately 50 pairs now constitutes nearly 10% of the British population. This species is protected under the Wildlife Act 1990. As many as 140 of these birds of prey have been counted coming in to roost in the Curragh.

4. The Curragh Habitat Enhancement Scheme leaflets are available from DAFF explaining which types of land are eligible for these management agreements.

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