Liberia's additions to the Ramsar List

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Liberia

Liberia names four new Ramsar sites

The Ramsar Secretariat is pleased to announce that Liberia has designated four new Wetlands of International Importance, bringing its total of designated sites to five. From a small rice-dominated site to a large mangrove forest along three rivers, to an important mangrove area associated with the capital city, Monrovia, the sites bring an interesting variety to the Ramsar List, and all are important for the wildlife they support and the services they provide for the population of Liberia. A Ramsar Small Grants Fund contribution was helpful in the preparation of the data for these listings, and the sites are designated as of 24 August 2006, which is Flag Day in Liberia. Ramsar’s Lucia Scodanibbio has prepared the following descriptions of the new sites, based upon the Ramsar Information Sheets.

Gbedin Wetlands (25 hectares, 07°16'N 008°48'W) is situated in Nimba county in the north of Liberia - the area is largely a swamp but also includes a man-made wetland with an irrigation system that includes channels, ditches, dams and drainages. The paddy fields provide a good feeding ground for many bird species including Palaearctic and Nearctic migrants as well as resident breeders such as the Plover Charadrius dubius, Bar-Godwit Limosa lapponica and the Forbes' Plover C. forbesi. The endemic otter shrew Micropotamogale lamottei also occurs in the area. The suitability of the swamp for rice cultivation prompted the government in 1960 to solicit technical assistance to introduce modern agricultural methods to local rice farmers in order to discourage shifting cultivation. The project, the Gbedin Swamp Rice Project, has employed a large number of local people, especially up to the onset of the civil war in 1990. The site is currently used for subsistence farming (rice), hunting and fishing, while the surroundings are used for logging and mining, as well as multiple crop farming. The use of fertilizers and pesticides are potential threats. In November 2005 elementary students were asked by the Ramsar CEPA focal point to depict the wise use concept through arts. Ramsar site no. 1628.

Kpatawee Wetlands (835 hectares, 07°07'N 009°38'W) is in Bong county - the Kpatawee waterfall falls within the rainforest zone of Liberia - one of the six major rivers in the country. While the river erodes the valley in its upper sections, it accumulates sand and gravel downstream, leaving patches of bare land along its course, which provide wintering grounds for large numbers of common Sandpipers and Palaearctic migrant species such as Little Ringed Plover and Greenshanks. The endangered Three-cusped Pangolin and Water Chevrotain occur at the site, too. The villagers value this area as a picnic ground, for hosting meetings, workshops and retreats, but the area and its resources are also used for palm wine production, hunting, fishing, basket making, bathing and other domestic uses. Within the site, the governments of Liberia and China undertook the Kpatawee Rice Project with the objective of introducing new rice farming methods to farmers, to discourage shifting cultivation. Threats to the site include the potential development of a hydropower scheme. The site is an ideal nature reserve and tourist attraction but has not officially been recognized for this purpose. Ramsar site no. 1629.

Marshall Wetlands (12,168 hectares, 06°08’N 010°22’W), in Margibi county, comprises three small rivers; the area has sandy and rocky shores, and further inland is a population of secondary forests and savannah woodland. The wetland
is chiefly a mangrove type with mature trees reaching up to 30m. In addition to the Red Colobus monkey, a number of
bird species listed by the Convention on Migratory Species appear in the area, such as the Glossy Ibis, Lesser Kestrel
and Common Pratincole. The site provides control against flooding and underground water recharge and is a sediment
trap. The very large stands of mangroves, fish population and wildlife are valuable resources for inhabitants in the
area. The three rivers are navigable and are used for transport from one village to another. The uncontrolled
harvesting of the mangrove forest and dynamiting of fish by local people are serious threats to the ecological
character of the site, as is pollution from a rubber company upstream. In addition, the presence of Chromolaena
odorata, an invasive alien species which provides host to harmful agricultural insects such as the variegated
grasshopper Zonocerus variegatus, is a serious problem for farmers. Research on chimpanzees for human vaccines
against hepatitis A, B and C is also being carried out at the site, with the animals released on islets in the mangroves
afterwards. Ramsar site no. 1630.

Mesurado Wetlands (6,760 hectares, 06°18'N 010°45'W) is located in the capital city Monrovia and Montserrado
County (the largest administrative region of the country with 1 million people), and the site is particularly important for
the protection of three mangrove species (Rhizophora harrisonii, R. mangle and Avicennia africana), which are
threatened by intense charcoal burning and fuel wood collection. It provides a favourable habitat and feeding ground
for several species of birds including the African spoonbill Platalea alba, Common Pratincole Glareola nuchalis and
Curlew Numenius arquata. It also hosts the vulnerable African dwarf crocodile, the Nile crocodile and the African sharp-
nosed crocodile and plays an important role in shoreline stabilization and sediment trapping. The site is currently used
for fuel wood collection, as a dumping site, for car washing, and fishing, with fish and crustaceans sold to the
population of Monrovia. An additional threat comes from unregulated fishing, as well as from pollution from the
industries around the site, including an oil refinery and paint factories. No management plan currently exists, but there
are plans to put it under a protected area management network once it has been successfully designated as a Ramsar
site. Ramsar site no. 1631.

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