

# Message from Martha Rojas Urrego Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands On the occasion of the World Migratory Bird Day

10 May 2019



A mixed flock of bar tailed Godwits and Grey plovers, coastal sand flats of Mersing Shores, Johor in Singapore.

Coastal wetlands are critical to the survival of migratory birds. The evidence is clear regarding the linkage between degradation and loss of coastal wetlands caused by pollution and a decline in the populations of migratory birds. Therefore, the focus on plastic pollution this World Migratory Bird Day is very timely.

Human pressure on coastal wetlands is increasing worldwide. Wetlands such as streams and rivers are collectors for industrial and biological waste in the form of sewage, plastic and rainwater runoff filled with nutrient-rich fertilizers and untreated wastewater.

This week the IPBES Global Assessment Report informed us that one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction. Nature everywhere is declining at a speed not previously seen. The Report confirms that plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980; 80 percent of the waste we produce, including plastic, is dumped untreated into freshwater ecosystems that drain into coastal zones. Eighty-five percent of wetlands present in 1700 have been lost by 2000 – and the loss continues at a rate three times faster than tropical forests.

These trends have a huge negative effect on populations of migratory birds. Migratory birds rely on networks of strategically located wetlands across their annual migration paths. An estimated 50 billion migratory birds each year travel thousands of kilometres, stopping along the way at beaches and estuaries that provide them with food, water and a place to rest. Coastal wetland are “refuelling stations”. If they disappear or are degraded, entire populations of birds are at risk.

The IPBES report is clear that we can still conserve and restore nature. But, only if we start now at every level from local to global. On a national level we need to adopt integrated management and cross-sectoral approaches that take into account the trade-offs of food and energy production, infrastructure, freshwater and coastal management, and biodiversity conservation.



Kujukuri beach, Chiba Prefecture

The amount of land and sea that is under protection needs to increase rapidly. Experts say that a third of our lands must be conserved. More effective conservation, restoration and management of networks of coastal wetlands are needed to safeguard migratory shorebird populations around the world.

Ramsar provides tools for protecting these areas. By joining the Convention, Member States designate and commit to maintain “Wetlands of International Importance”, often called Ramsar Sites, and one of the criteria for identifying these wetlands is their role in supporting migrating birds.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands since its inception in 1971 has committed to protection of migratory birds. Of the current 2,340 Ramsar Sites (covering over 252 million hectares of wetlands worldwide) 1,103 are specifically designated as key sites for migratory birds.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands looks forward to working in partnership with others in the development and implementation of effective governance and management practices to ensure the conservation and wise use of coastal wetlands thus safeguarding the survival of migratory birds and all the world’s species.

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