Damselflies (Rhinocypha humeralis) play an important ecological role as they are one of the most visible indicators of the ecosystem health and biophysical conditions of wetland areas in which they breed. They are also helpful to potential human health risks by consuming mosquitoes and their larvae. They also eat other small invertebrates which make them valuable in controlling harmful insect populations. Loss of damselflies could have a ripple effect on food webs.

Wetlands are essential for human health and prosperity. They provide us with freshwater, ensure our food supply and sustain biodiversity. Therefore, the focus of the International Day for Biological Diversity on “biodiversity, food and health” is timely and interconnected to the health of wetlands.

Wetlands are critical for sustaining biodiversity; 40 per cent of the world’s species live and breed in wetlands. Wetlands are home to 30 per cent of all known fish. An estimated 50 billion migratory birds each year travel thousands of kilometres, stopping along the way at wetlands that provide them with food, water and a place to rest.

Wetlands are among the most productive life-support systems in the world and are of immense socio-economic importance to humans.

Much of the world’s food, essential for human health and well-being, comes from wetland ecosystems. Rice, grown in wetland paddies, is the staple diet of 3.5 billion people. Inland fisheries and aquaculture in coastal wetlands supply about 40 per cent of the world’s production of fish, contributing significantly to food security in many communities.

Wetlands are crucial for pollution control, nutrient recycling and ground water recharge. They act as filters absorbing pesticides and chemicals and removing harmful waste from water and thus contribute to improving water quality. Poor water quality is recognized as a growing global threat; access to safe drinking water is a daily challenge for 1.8 billion people.

In cities, wetlands improve urban air quality. When preserved as green spaces in cities, wetlands offer a space for recreation and access to a variety of plant and animal life. Studies confirm that interacting with nature reduces stress and improves our health.

Ironically, despite the myriad values wetlands provide, they are perceived as wastelands. They have been drained, filled, despoiled and degraded. Very few people know that 70 per cent of the world’s wetlands have been lost since the 1700’s. Thirty-five percent of wetlands have been lost in only last 50
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The recent IPBES Global Assessment Report raises the alarm that nature everywhere is declining at a speed not previously seen and that one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction. Most affected are species that live in lakes, rivers and wetlands – these animals have seen an 81% drop in populations.

By losing ecosystems and biodiversity, we are eroding the very foundation of our economies, livelihoods, health and quality of life worldwide.

The report states that we can still conserve and restore nature, ecosystems and biodiversity. 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. The functions and economic values of wetlands must be considered in planning for the production of food and other agricultural products in order to respond to growing demand.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is a ready-made mechanism for bringing together 170 countries and providing the global framework for the conservation and sustainable use of all wetlands.

As the international community steps up efforts to define a collective post 2020 agenda for biodiversity we must ensure that wetlands gain the global attention as our health and the health of the planet depend on healthy wetlands.

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