Three new Ramsar Sites for China

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China

China has designated three new Ramsar Sites, bringing the total number of Sites in the country to 49. The recent additions are Anhui Shengjin Lake National Nature Reserve on the south bank of the middle and lower reaches of the River Yangtze, Zhangye Heihe Wetland National Nature Reserve along the Heihe River on the plains of the historic Gansu Corridor trading route in north-western China, and Guangdong Nanpeng Archipelago Wetlands, a chain of four islands in the most northern section of the South China Sea.

Dominated by lakes and freshwater marshes and boasting good water quality, Anhui Shengjin Lake National Nature Reserve (Ramsar Site no.2248) is one of the best preserved inland freshwater lake systems along the middle and lower reaches of the River Yangtze. The Site plays a role in regulating floods along the Yangtze, and contributes to water purification and regional climate regulation. It also provides an important stopover and wintering ground for migrating waterbirds along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway: a total of 175 bird species have been recorded, including globally threatened species such as the critically endangered Baer’s pochard (*Aythya baeri*) and Siberian crane (*Grus leucogeranus*), and the endangered oriental stork (*Ciconia boyciana*). Known as the “Chinese crane lake”, Shengjin Lake is the largest wintering ground in China for the vulnerable hooded crane (*Grus monacha*) whose numbers can reach up to 500, the highest population count in the world.

Surrounded by the extremely fragile environment of the temperate desert, Zhangye Heihe Wetland National Nature Reserve (Site no.2246) is the largest oasis zone in north-western China. It plays a critical role in regulating surface runoff, storing floodwater and mitigating drought impacts, supporting regional biodiversity, and maintaining ecological security. The Site includes a rich variety of landscapes such as glaciers and snowy mountains, forests and grasslands, deserts and oases, and red Danxia landforms. It is dominated by aquatic systems such as natural rivers, lakes, swamps and meadows which are important breeding and stopover grounds for a variety of globally threatened birds including Baer’s pochard (*Aythya baeri*), saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*), and relict gull (*Larus*...
relictus). The Reserve is also the largest breeding habitat for black stork (Ciconia nigra) in East Asia, with a stable population of above 300 every year and the highest recorded being above 500. The Site is in an extremely arid environment with average annual precipitation of only 129 mm, and so the wetland ecosystems of the region are vulnerable to any change in climate that exacerbates the impacts of drought, high temperature and evaporation.

Located in the northern section of the South China Sea, Guangdong Nanpeng Archipelago Wetlands (Site no.2249) cover a chain of four islands that support diverse habitats and ecosystems such as upwellings, rocky marine shores, coral reefs and algae layers. The Site is located at the interface of shallow coastal and deeper sea waters, and at the confluence of two upwelling zones. The average water depth is from 1.0 to 1.5 metres, but deeper water at the Site’s periphery contributes to its ecological character. The Site hosts a wide range of rare and endangered marine species such as the basking shark (Cetorhinus maximus), whale shark (Rhincodon typus) and great seahorse (Hippocampus kelloggi), and birds such as the Chinese egret (Egretta eulophotes), Christmas frigatebird (Fregata andrewsi) and short-tailed albatross (Phoebastria albatrus). The islands are an important spawning ground for five threatened turtle species, and play an important role in the conservation of biodiversity not only in the biogeographic region but also in East Asia as a whole. The Site is extensively used for ecological and environmental research.

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