A special WWD event was organised by Nicolas Jarraud in Nicosia, coordinating the Bi-Communal Development Programme in Cyprus funded by USAID and UNDP (www.unospmu.org) and executed by UNOPS. On 8 February, a conference on the wetlands of Cyprus was held in the centre of Nicosia, right on the line that has separated for more than thirty years the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities.

Nicolas pointed out the strategic location of the island of Cyprus at the crossroads of waterbird migration routes between Eurasia and Africa, testified by the importance of Cyprus’s two existing Ramsar Sites: the salt lakes of Larnaca and Akrotiri (in the UK Sovereign Base Area). Despite its rather dry climate, Cyprus also holds some important marshlands, e.g. the Phasuri (part of the Akrotiri Ramsar Site) and Famagusta marshes, and the unique Karpas peninsula with a largely untouched coastline and sand beaches of vital importance as nesting grounds for sea turtles, an outstanding area that needs urgent protection from uncontrolled development.

A large number of small dams retain much water for irrigation, thus lowering the pressure for groundwater abstraction. In addition, many of them provide important small-scale habitats for wetland-related species of flora and fauna. This was illustrated by Hasibe Kusetogullari, an environmental expert from the Turkish Cypriot Community. She presented an inventory of 35 wetland sites in the northern part of the island. Michalis Loizides provided a view on wetland conservation from the eyes of an engineer, supporting Ramsar’s plea to link wetland conservation with water management strategies, presented by Tobias Salathé. Andreas Demetropoulos replaced his wife Miroula Hadjichristoforou, Ramsar’s focal point at the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, unable to attend. He illustrated recent management interventions at Larnaca salt lake, a Ramsar Site that needed to be cleaned from heavy lead pollution by drastic interventions. Close to a shooting club situated at the lake shore (but now removed) densities of lead pellets reached 98,000 pellets/m² (!), killing large numbers of flamingos who accumulated the lead pellets in their bodies. To prevent further casualties, the only remedy was to scrape off the top 10 cm layer of the lake bottom.

On the next day, the participants profited from the new freedom of movement across the island and visited first Larnaca salt lake and then the Panagra reservoir in the north part of the island. The participants concluded that Cyprus’s wetlands are the precious ecological heritage of all Cypriots, and can only adequately be protected by coordinated efforts by all parts of society, involving all communities on the island (cf. attached press release).
The Hala Sultan Tekke mosque, an important Muslim pilgrimage site, is situated right at the shore of Larnaca salt lake, the first Cyprus Ramsar Site next to Larnaca's international airport. This created some visitor management problems that are now dealt with efficiently by the salt lake management committee.

Nicolas Jarraud (UNOPS) providing explanations to Hasibe Kusetogullari (left) and a Turkish Cypriot colleague.
A group of 7000 flamingos using Larnaca salt lake as a winter quarter, right in front the airport, now getting ready for colonial breeding in the salt lakes of central Anatolia, some 600 km further northeast.

The WWD celebration participants visiting Panagra reservoir at the western end of the Pentadactylos mountains separating Cyprus’s interior agricultural plain from the northern coast, rapidly built up for tourist purposes over the recent years.
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