



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES

CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES

(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

## PRESS RELEASE

### The “Garden of Eden” now internationally protected as Wetlands of International Importance

**Gland, Switzerland |29 September 2015** - The Government of Iraq has recently designated Central Marshes and Hammar Marsh in the southern part of the country as Wetlands of International Importance (‘Ramsar Sites’) under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. These two marshes, together with the existing Hawizeh Marsh Ramsar Site, form the last remnants of the once extensive, lush and richly diverse Mesopotamian Marshlands in southern Iraq.

The marshes are also referred to as the “Garden of Eden”, or the “Cradle of Civilization”, since their history goes back as far as the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC when the first literate societies appeared. The Mesopotamian Marshes were once entirely populated by the Marsh Arabs, who used to build their floating islands and reed houses in the marshes, developing entire villages linked by a network of channels. Not only is the area of extraordinary historical and cultural value, but it also provides a range of internationally and regionally important ecosystem services.

The marshes serve as an important staging and wintering site for a number of globally threatened birds such as the Basra reed warbler (*Acrocephalus griseldis*), the marbled duck (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*), and the greater spotted eagle (*Aquila clanga*). The marshes also support the endangered Euphrates softshell turtle (*Rafetus euphraticus*) and the vulnerable smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*).

In the past, the important services provided by the marshes were disrupted or degraded by extensive draining that began in the 1950s and accelerated in the 1990s because of land reclamation and war. Restoration has been carried out since 2003, but has not been able to completely re-flood the marshes to their original extent due to declining rainfall and the construction of dams. As a result less water has been entering Iraq through Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In the recent years the conditions of marshes have worsened also due to severe droughts.

By adding all the major wetlands that form the Mesopotamian Marshes into the List of Wetlands of International Importance, the Government of Iraq has signalled its long-term commitment to restore the marshes and the vital ecosystem services they provide to the communities and the world.

Click [here](#) for more information about the Central Marshes Ramsar Site and [here](#) for more information about the Hammar Marsh Ramsar Site.

## **Note to editors**

### **About the Ramsar Convention**

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the global framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is the only global treaty to focus on a single ecosystem. The Convention was signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and entered into force in 1975. Since then, 168 countries, almost 90% of UN member states from the entire world's geographic regions have acceded and become Contracting Parties. The State of Kuwait will become the 169th Contracting Party to the Convention on Wetlands.

Under this treaty, member states undertake to ensure the wise use of all the wetlands in their territory by undertaking local and national action, and collaborate internationally to maintain the ecological characteristics of wetlands. Each Contracting Party upon accession to the Convention designates at least one priority wetland site as a Wetland of International Importance because of the valuable ecosystem services they provide. These Sites are added to the network of Ramsar Sites worldwide. Currently there are over 2,200 designated Ramsar Sites globally, covering an area of 210 million hectares, an area larger than Mexico.

### **About wetlands**

The definition of the word 'wetland', under the Convention, is any land area that is saturated or flooded with water, either seasonally or permanently. Inland wetlands include aquifers, lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, peatlands, ponds, flood plains and swamps. Coastal wetlands include all coastlines, mangroves, saltmarshes, estuaries, lagoons, sea grass meadows and coral reefs.

**Contact Information:** Camilla Chalmers, Head of Communication. Tel. +41 79 949 6013.

Email [chalmers@ramsar.org](mailto:chalmers@ramsar.org)

Website [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

Twitter <https://twitter.com/RamsarConv>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/RamsarConventionOnWetlands>