



The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the **conservation** and **wise use** of wetlands and their resources.

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STRP Newsletter

2010/2

The quarterly Newsletter of the Scientific & Technical Review Panel (STRP) of the Ramsar Convention

Dear STRP National Focal Points:

This newsletter has been created by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat in collaboration with STRP members and Observer Organizations with the purpose of keeping you informed on the progress of the Panel's work during this triennium 2009-2012, and to provide you with useful information on wetland conservation for the implementation of the Convention in your own country, as well as to enhance our STRP network throughout the regions.

If you would like to contribute with new items for the next newsletter, please send them to strp@ramsar.org

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- List of STRP National Focal Points [Click here](#)
- List of Ramsar Administrative Authorities [Click here](#)
- List of CEPA National Focal Points [Click here](#)
- List of STRP Members [Click here](#)
- STRP Support Service <http://www.wetlands.org/strp/>
- The Ramsar Site Information Service <http://ramsar.wetlands.org/>
- The Global Environmental Flows Network www.eflownet.org

Ramsar's International Organization Partners (IOPs):

- BirdLife International www.birdlife.org
- IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) www.iucn.org
- IWMI (International Water Management Institute) www.iwmi.cgiar.org
- Wetlands International www.wetlands.org
- WWF www.panda.org

General Matters

HIGHLIGHTS FROM STRP MIDTERM WORKSHOPS

Are you wondering whether there has been good progress with STRP tasks at the STRP mid-term workshops held in the Ramsar Secretariat offices in Gland, Switzerland, from the 19-26 February 2010?



Plenary session

The answer is yes, undoubtedly STRP members and all other participants have squeezed their brains to the maximum to advance as much as possible the work of the STRP tasks, to come up with the updated STRP work plan and the list of anticipated products and their timelines in view of COP11. Writing workshops, brainstorming sessions, plenary discussions, informal gatherings, evening sessions...each of the ten Thematic Work Areas had some time allocated to its work.

For all the outcomes have a look at the [Report of the STRP mid-term workshops](#) and the updated [STRP Work Plan](#). The report's Annexes are accessible [here](#).

Here below some flavour of our key discussions.

- Soon the launch of the new web portal to engage better with European STRP National Focal Points –one year pilot project that could be replicated for the other regions.
- 2010 to explore the new “face” for the STRP Support Service. STRP NFPs will be asked to help us identifying needs and key functions that this new web-based platform should have.
- Work session between UN-Habitat and Ramsar STRP experts on management of urban wetlands. The group of experts worked to identify specific wetland-related guidance which can be incorporated into UN-Habitat’s Sustainable Cities Programme, thus providing an effective channel for delivery of guidance on wetlands to local governments, urban planners and policy makers. This offers an excellent example of inter-sectoral collaboration in implementation of an aspect of the Changwon Declaration! ([Resolution X.3](#)).
- Planning to prepare a first edition of the “State of the World’s Wetlands and their services to people” (SoWW) report: further recognition of the value of such a publication, and that funds will be sought for it.
- Wetlands and extractive industries: progress in the development of low-cost methodologies to identify vulnerable wetlands in mining hotspots.
- Development of a framework for guidance on avoidance, mitigation and compensation for wetland losses and the roles of restoration in this.
- Further developing work on wetlands and carbon storage, partly in follow-up to the November 2009 Danone Fund for Nature workshop on this topic.
- One of the biggest topics for discussion was the suite of tasks related to re-development of the guidance for the selection and designation of Ramsar sites, and needs for data and information at the point of designation, including options for revising the format of the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) (see separate article in this newsletter). This is envisaged as a substantial re-packaging of guidance that would go to COP11. All STRP members, National Focal Points and IOPs are encouraged to follow the discussions on this topic, in order to be able to assist Contracting Parties to understand the implications of the possible changes to some core processes related to Ramsar site designation and reporting.



The “Urban Wetlands” working group



The “wetlands & Carbon” writing group

...STRP RECOMMENDATIONS TO STANDING COMMITTEE 41

Volcano's ash permitting, Standing Committee members will meet up next week in Kobuleti, Georgia for their 41st Meeting to discuss the Implementation of the Convention.

This year the important task of reporting back on the work progress of the Panel will be carried out by our Deputy Secretary General, on behalf of the STRP Chair.

SC members will be request to endorse the updated STRP work Plan 2009-2012 and also to encourage the other Contracting Parties to find ways of funding those STRP priority tasks for which sufficient resources are not yet available. It's worth reminding that despite the extensive STRP work plan, only a limited number of tasks have been initiated so far due to very limited available funds and that STRP members mostly work on a voluntary basis.

Voluntary contributions will be also sought to support the travel costs for participation of the three STRP members nominated by the Secretary General as authors for the upcoming 5th Assessment Report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) if they are appointed.

Contacting Parties will also be encouraged to provide support, as far as possible, for their appointed STRP NFPs to participate in regional preparatory meetings and to attend STRP meetings or workshops when this is practical and feasible.

The STRP Chair's Report to SC41 also include a set of recommendations for STRP participation at COP11 and a briefing note on the proposed suggestions for the re-development of the guidance for the selection and designation of Ramsar sites, and needs for data and information at the point of designation.

Have a look at the full [document \(SC41-26\)](#).

Monica Zavagli, Heather MacKay and Nick Davidson

PREVENTING AND MANAGING WILDLIFE DISEASES IN WETLANDS

The consequences of the emergence and spread of diseases affecting humans, wildlife and domestic animals has rapidly risen up conservation and sustainable development agendas in recent years. The interface between wildlife,



humans and domestic animals has resulted in complex exchanges of diseases, especially in wetlands, which has resulted in sometimes severe impacts on biodiversity, public health, domestic animal health and welfare, and livelihoods. An example from recent years of a disease occurring at this interface is highly pathogenic avian influenza of subtype H5N1 (see following article), which likely developed in domestic poultry (pathogenic amplification), has 'spilled-over' into wild birds with direct and indirect impacts on conservation, and caused disease in humans with high case-mortality (currently 59%).

Many other examples exist and accordingly, Ramsar COP 10 requested that STRP provide advice on how "best to develop practical guidance on the prevention and control of other diseases of

either domestic or wild animals in wetlands, especially those diseases that have implications for human health, and how such guidance can be best incorporated into management plans at Ramsar sites and other wetlands" (see paragraph 21 of [Resolution X.21](#)).

The task is potentially enormous and a small group from the STRP and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust have been working to give focus to this task. An initial step has been to disseminate a short questionnaire, seeking input from a wide range of potential users of such guidance. The **questionnaire** remains open until the end of April and is available online in English, French and Spanish:

- www.surveymonkey.com/s/2NKTYWV (English)
- www.surveymonkey.com/s/3Q3GBPP (French)
- www.surveymonkey.com/s/F3PJ5X2 (Spanish)

So far, responses have been received from 52 individuals from a range of countries in most Ramsar regions. Already the exercise has been useful in determining the level of need for wildlife disease guidance, identifying

priority areas where guidance is needed, and identifying case studies as well as individuals who have offered to help with, and comment on, draft guidelines in due course.

On 17th March, a one day workshop was held at FAO's headquarters in Rome. This determined that the proposed guidelines would be highly structured in such a way as to provide a 'gateway' for non-specialists, both to key summarised information as well as direction to further, more detailed sources.

Initial sections will summarise general principles of disease prevention and control. Subsequent short information sheets will be prepared for a number of disease prevention and control procedures and relevant key wetland diseases, e.g. highly pathogenic avian influenza, epizootic ulcerative syndrome (EUS), avian cholera and red tide toxicosis. Whilst available resources currently limit the number of such sheets that can be drafted prior to COP11, we hope that further information sheets might be developed in due course.

We are excited by the potential this task gives to generate valuable guidance – for which there is a clear need – for wetland managers. We would greatly welcome further inputs to this work, and encourage all to complete the short questionnaire which will help us considerably!

David Stroud, Rebecca Lee & Ruth Cromie

THIRD TECHNICAL MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC TASK FORCE ON AVIAN INFLUENZA AND WILD BIRDS

An international workshop was convened by the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds and hosted at the FAO headquarters in Rome in March 2010.

The Task Force, established in 2005 by UNEP/CMS in close cooperation with AEWA, is currently co-convened by UNEP/CMS and FAO, whilst coordination and web-site maintenance is provided by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. The Task Force provides a liaison mechanism between those international organisations and MEAs engaged in activities related to the spread of HPAI H5N1, and comprises representatives and observers from 15 organisations, including four UN agencies.

The Task Force was established out of a need for information on wild birds to be better reflected in the debate about HPAI H5N1 and its spread across Asia, Africa and Europe. Its activity has been crucial to help develop collaborations, joint multidisciplinary work programmes and to advance understanding of the factors associated with the spread of HPAI H5N1.

Risk factors associated with the disease and means of reducing them have been summarised in a considerable body of guidance, much of it stimulated by the Task Force and its members. Technical guidance has been published by FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and others, whilst advice to policy-makers has been endorsed by several MEAs, notably in 2008 by the Ramsar COP 10, CMS COP 9 and AEWA MOP 4.



The third Technical Workshop, built upon outcomes of Task Force meetings held in [2006](#) and [2007](#), reviewed what has been achieved in addressing the spread of HPAI H5N1, both in terms of the Task Force's original objectives, as well as obligations under relevant MEAs, and determined the future role and direction of the Task Force.

The conclusions and recommendations from the meeting will be available on www.aiweb.info and an FAO press release summarising some of the main findings is available at <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/40827/icode>.

Perhaps one of the most significant of the reflections from the workshop was that, in the context of wild bird conservation, it is clear that the views of many have moved from an often automatic blame of wild birds for every outbreak of HPAI H5N1, to more balanced positions that recognise the poultry sector (especially in east Asia) is the primary reservoir of this virus, with regular spill-over of infection into wild bird populations. Such changed awareness is greatly welcome and better reflects current scientific understanding.

Review of conservation impacts: The Task Force is currently undertaking a review of the conservation impacts of HPAI H5N1 a framework for which was discussed at the workshop. It is hoped that this will eventually be published

as a summary of both the negative and positive impacts of the spread of H5N1 and thus help preparedness for future outbreaks.

Significant conservation impacts derived from often misleading and sometimes frankly hysterical media reporting: headlines such as “Invasion of the Killer Flu” and “Ducks of Death” and newspaper articles which made explicit links between wetland conservation activity and enhanced risk of HPAI incursion. Such reporting affected public attitudes (at least in the short term) towards birds, leading to reduced visitor attendance at wetland centres and a range of other diverse consequences.

We are particularly interested as to whether similar events occurred in other countries. An initial framework of ideas is on the Support Service and we would welcome contributions!

Further information on the Task Force and its work can be found at www.aiweb.info.

David Stroud, Rebecca Lee & Ruth Cromie

NEW REVIEW SHOWS WETLANDS AND WATER AS CRUCIAL TO THIS YEAR'S BIODIVERSITY MEETINGS

...STRP, SBSTTA14 and the CBD revised Strategic Plan post-2010

The fourteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the CBD will be held in Nairobi, 10-21 May 2010. The meeting will consider, amongst other things, the in-depth review of the programme of work on inland waters biodiversity. Ramsar Secretariat and STRP have provided significant and valuable inputs into the in-depth review and in particular regarding an assessment of the status and trends of inland waters biodiversity (wetlands). The information was compiled based largely on an analysis of information from indicators in use by Ramsar and Ramsar National reports proved to be a very fruitful source of information on the effectiveness of policies and trends in the status of wetland protected areas. The pre-session document (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/14/3) summarises the main findings and provides draft recommendations. Information document number 3 (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/14/INF/3) provides a summary of the background information for the review and information document number 1 (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/14/INF/1) provides a more detailed analysis of the effectiveness of indicators for assessing progress towards the 2010 target and, importantly, observations on targets and indicators for the post 2010 period. Documents are available at: <http://www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=SBSTTA-14>

The review confirms the continuing, and very likely accelerating, loss of biodiversity of inland waters and highlights the importance of this in terms of loss of wetland services and consequent impacts on reduced ability of these ecosystems to support human well-being and sustainable development. A key finding of the review is the importance of ongoing changes in water cycles driven largely by direct human interventions which will be amplified by climate change. Major disruptions of water cycles are occurring on local, regional and continental scales, particularly with groundwater. These changes are leading to significant shifts in terrestrial ecosystems and wetlands. There are also significant, and under-recognised, relationships between the carbon and water cycles with negative feedback between water availability and carbon storage leading to the uncomfortable conclusion that carbon storage by forests can be vulnerable to shifts in water cycles, requiring better attention to both cycles. It also notes the critical importance of water to sustainable development and its very high profile on the political and development agenda. In addition, climate change adaptation is largely about managing water and this presents significant opportunities, for example with regards to disaster risk reduction. Yet the CBD, currently, plays scant regard to water in an ecosystem context. There needs to be better recognition that water is an ecosystem service and its sustained availability (and quality) depends on biodiversity and ecological processes. In addition, water provides the strongest links between biodiversity and human development. Terminology in the documentation and the recommendations has focussed on “water” and “water cycles” noting that although wetlands play a critical role in water supplies, so do forests and other ecosystems. It is not just a wetland issue.



The key recommendations of the review centre on the need to establish water as a much more prominent issue in the CBD and one that transcends all programmes of work. Apart from its scientific logic, this conclusion also will significantly enhance the relevance of the CBD to development by addressing the opportunities for biodiversity to contribute to improved water security. Placing water higher on the CBD agenda also

offers significantly enhanced opportunities for better recognition of the cross-cutting relevance of the Ramsar Convention to the interests of the CBD. Regarding science, the review notes the need for improved policy relevant

knowledge on the implications, and inter-relations of changes in hydrology/water cycles and terrestrial ecosystems (including wetlands). The documentation covers further issues of course and not all relevant needs are captured in the current draft recommendations due to space limitations. Other considerations need to be strengthened during the discussions at the meeting, and support for this from STRP members and others participating in SBSTTA14 will be important.

The Strategic Plan of the CBD will be revised for the post-2010 period at COP-10. SBSTTA-14 will address the subject of technical aspects of targets and indicators but the main discussion of the Strategic Plan will occur during the Working Group on Review of Implementation (WGRI) immediately following SBSTTA; also to be held in Nairobi (24-28 May). It is essential that the revised Strategic Plan, which will include new objectives and targets post-2010, fully reflect not only water (as above) but also incorporates full and proper attention to other aspects of wetlands.

Ramsar and its STRP continue to work well with the CBD but in particular in relation to the programme of work on inland waters. There are opportunities to further improve resonance with other programme areas including for marine and coastal areas, forests, drylands, mountains and in particular for protected areas. STRP members are encouraged to consider this in the course of their work across the different thematic areas of the Panel's own current programme. There are also further opportunities for enhanced partnerships in dialogue with economic, business, public and development interests and especially in relation to water management and water security.

David Coates and David Pritchard

Topic of the Quarter

REPACKAGING RAMSAR GUIDANCE RELATED TO THE DESCRIPTION OF SITES AT DESIGNATION

Ramsar COP 11 requested STRP to undertake a number of tasks related to the Convention's guidance on selection of Ramsar sites, and needs for data and information at the point of designation. These tasks include:

- a review of the consistency, logic and clarity of the targets and guidelines that support Ramsar's site selection criteria;
- seeking the views of users of this guidance;
- a review of options for revising the format of the [Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands \(RIS\)](#) seeking to ensure linkages and synergies with other Ramsar instruments to collect and report data and information on listed sites; and
- further consideration of data and information needs related to the description of ecological character at the point of designation (and assessment of potential change thereafter).

Significant discussion was undertaken on these tasks at the February STRP mid-term workshops.

In view of the significant linkages in the nature of these individual tasks, they are being undertaken together in an integrated manner so as to harmonise the relevant technical guidances and to avoid – as far as possible – the risk of future changes.

STRP are working to **simplify** the guidance associated with the site selection Criteria, '**repackaging**' the various existing agreed guidances which have developed separately over time and accordingly have a degree of unnecessary overlap. A further principle adopted is to ensure that guidances and proposals reflect the very variable extent of data and information on sites available in different countries. The scientific 'ideal' may simply be impracticable in some developing countries owing to resource and other constraints. STRP are accordingly exploring hierarchical approach to some aspects of guidance that recognises that some countries are less 'data-rich' than others.

A central need, repeatedly expressed is the need for an unambiguous description of ecological character at the point of designation which can act as a baseline description. STRP work has shown that a significant amount of the data and information used with the Convention's Ecological Character Description Sheet (as defined in [Resolution X.15](#)) can be delivered by the RIS. Ensuring the RIS delivers the necessary information on ecological character has the advantage of:

- a. reduces reporting burdens by seeking to collect data once that has utility for several different processes;
- b. ensures that data collected at the point of designation much better defines ecological character against which future changes of site status can be assessed; and



- c. gives potential of using data collected at the point of designation (and updates thereof) for other MEA reporting processes, thus reducing national reporting burdens.

With the assistance of the Secretariat, STRP is seeking input from individuals in Contracting Parties and others with recent experience of compiling and submitting RIS. Learning from such experience is essential to avoid potential ambiguities. **If you are able to help this task by completing this short questionnaire, please contact Monica Zavagli at zavagli@ramsar.org for a copy.**

Recent international assessments have highlighted the 85% global loss of bivalve (shellfish) reefs a wetland type which provide a wide range of ecosystem services and are of significant economic benefit in the regions where they occur. Few, however, have been listed at Ramsar sites. To promote consideration for such listing, STRP accordingly proposed to draft specific additional guidance for the inclusion of bivalve (shellfish) reefs in the Ramsar List. This will be included in the reformulated guidance described above.

STRP would welcome comments on, or input to this task so that any new guidance reflects the best available experience and practise. Thank you!

STRP lead: David Stroud (David.Stroud@jncc.gov.uk)

Meetings

Recent meetings

- Meeting of the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds 23 March 2010 FAO, Rome, Italy
- Partners Meeting and Steering Committee meeting of the “Wings over Wetlands” (WOW) African-Eurasian waterbird flyways GEF-funded project, 8 - 12 March 2010. South Africa
- Meeting of the Mediterranean Wetland Observatory (MWO) and the new European Space Agency GlobWetland-II project. 8 -11 February 2010, Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat, France

Upcoming meetings

- 3rd ad-hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). 7 - 11 June 2010. Busan, Republic of Korea
- 14th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the CBD. 10 - 21 May 2010. Nairobi, Kenya
- 3rd Meeting of the Ad-Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Review of Implementation of the CBD, 24 - 28 May. Nairobi, Kenya
- 31st Annual meeting of the Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS) , 27 June - 2 July 2010, Salt Lake City, US

Announcements

RAMSAR AND THE SOCIETY FOR WETLAND SCIENTISTS (SWS)



As many of you might already know, the [Society for Wetland Scientists \(SWS\)](#) is a large international organization of about 3,500 members dedicated to fostering sound wetland science, education, and management. Despite its name, the Society brings together not only researchers, but also students, government scientists, private sector consultants, and wetland practitioners. The SWS has i) an International chapter that among others, supports initiatives to strengthen ties with other international wetland organizations including the [Ramsar Secretariat](#) and [Wetlands International](#) and ii) regional “chapters”. SWS is already an active observer organization to the STRP.

Following discussions with SWS members at the STRP mid-term workshops about further strengthening the linkages the work of STRP and the SWS, it is being proposed to establish a “Ramsar Section” of SWS.

Sections within the SWS membership are intended to facilitate interactions among SWS members with similar professional interests, and to contribute to the success of the annual SWS meeting. The primary responsibility of

Sections is to organize symposia, workshops or other activities at the annual meeting; however, the Sections are also encouraged to organize additional activities apart from the annual meeting. This may include facilitating input from the SWS membership on specific Ramsar sites or other wetlands, or contributing to the development of technical guidance.

Twenty-five (25) founder members are required to establish a Section. A number of SS members have already indicated their interest in becoming members of this Ramsar Section. If you are interested in helping to form the Section, (noting that you also have to be a member of SWS!) please let George Lukacs know (george.lukacs@jcu.edu.au) as soon as possible. Also, please pass this email onto others who may wish to participate.

The aim is to seek SWS Board approval and possibly launch the Ramsar Section at the SWS conference in June this year in Salt Lake City!

Also do let us know if your are planning to attend the SWS S.L.C. conference: several STRP members and Ramsar secretariat staff will be there and presenting in various sessions.

Monica Zavagli and Nick Davidson

THREE STRP MEMBERS IN NOMINATION FOR THE IPCC 5TH ASSESSMENT REPORT

The STRP considers that one of the most effective ways to provide high-quality, relevant wetlands information to ongoing scientific processes related to climate change is to participate as fully as possible in preparation of the 5th Assessment Report of the IPCC. To this end, three nominations for authors have been submitted to IPCC in response to their call for nominations:

- Prof **Max Finlayson** of Charles Sturt University, Australia, who is the lead STRP member for wetlands and climate change, has been nominated for IPCC Working Group 2 concerning ecosystem impacts, adaptation and vulnerability;
- Dr **Colin Lloyd** of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Wallingford, UK, who has been working as an STRP Invited Expert on a current STRP task related to the role of wetlands in global carbon storage and carbon cycles, and who has also served as a member of the Danone Fund for Nature Expert Panel, has been nominated for IPCC Working Group 3 concerning mitigation; and
- Dr **Matthew McCartney**, who represents the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) on the STRP, has been nominated for IPCC Working Group 2 concerning freshwater impacts, adaptation and vulnerability, and for the Africa chapter.

While we cannot guarantee that any of our nominations will be accepted by the IPCC, we appreciate the willingness of the candidates to be nominated by Ramsar, since this requires a very significant commitment of authors' time and energy during the preparation of an IPCC Assessment Report! Many thanks.

STRP Chair

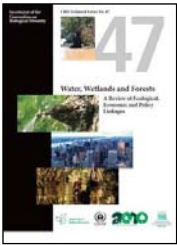
WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

The Secretariats of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement ([UNEP/AEWA](#)) and the Convention on Migratory Species ([UNEP/CMS](#)) are pleased to announce the countdown for World Migratory Bird Day 2010. This two-day awareness raising campaign will take place globally for the fifth consecutive year from **8-9 May 2010**.



World Migratory Bird Day ([WMBD](#)) aims to inspire people to take action for the conservation of migratory birds and encourages national authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), clubs and societies, universities, schools and individuals around the world to organize events and programmes, which help draw attention to migratory birds around a central theme each year.

This year's theme is "Save migratory birds in crisis – every species counts!" It is closely linked to the International Year of Biodiversity ([IYB](#)) declared by the United Nations for 2010.



JOINT CBD/RAMSAR PUBLICATION - WATER, WETLANDS AND FORESTS

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), in collaboration with the Ramsar Secretariat and other partners, has recently released "[*Water, Wetlands and Forests: A Review of Ecological, Economic and Policy Linkage*](#)", a report which aims to foster better awareness of the crucial role that forests and wetlands play in sustaining the availability and quality of water critical for human well-being.

Publications

A Quick Scan of Peatlands in Central and Eastern Europe. Wetlands International
(<http://www.wetlands.org/WatchRead/Allourpublications/tabid/1911/mod/1570/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/2429/Default.aspx>)

Cities and Biodiversity Newsletter of the Convention on Biological Diversity
<http://www.cbd.int/authorities/doc/newsletter/cities-newsletter-01-01-en.pdf>

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The previous editions of the STRP Newsletter are posted on the main Ramsar Website. You can view them [here](#)

Photos on the front page: left: right:

Lac Tsimantampetsotsa Ramsar site in Madagascar, *Carlos Anwandter Sanctuary (Río Cruces)* Ramsar site in Chile