



# World Wetlands Day:

## “Celebrating our Wetlands of International Importance”

# 2 february 2000

### What is World Wetlands Day?

**2** February each year is World Wetlands Day. It marks the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the shores of the Caspian Sea. WWD was celebrated for the first time in 1997 and made an encouraging beginning. The second, in 1998, was organized around the suggested theme of the importance of water to life and of wetlands to the supply of water. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and groups of citizens at all levels of the community took advantage of the opportunity to undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general and the Ramsar Convention in particular. The Convention's Web site posted reports from more than 50 countries of WWD '98 activities of all sizes and shapes, from lectures and seminars, nature walks, children's art contests, sampan races, and community clean-up days, to radio and television interviews and letters to newspapers, to the launch of new wetland policies, new Ramsar sites, and new programmes at the national level.

The suggested theme of World Wetlands Day 1999 was “**People and Wetlands: the Vital Link**”, and once again, government agencies and citizen groups at all levels seized the occasion to bring to public notice the vital importance of wetland benefits for human well-being. At wetland sites large and small, in both the southern and northern hemispheres, and even in the frozen far north, activities of all sorts were carried out in at least 60 countries on and around 2 February in celebration of the values, benefits, and beauty of wetlands. The governments of many Ramsar member countries used WWD '99 to help make their citizens aware of what they are doing to assure the health of the nation's wetlands and to implement the Convention's cornerstone “wise use principle”, synonymous with sustainable use. And, at the same time, school classes, nature clubs, birdwatching societies, and park managers at the local level found imaginative ways to involve their communities and bring wetland values into public focus.

### “Wetlands of International Importance”

**a**ll wetlands have important values and provide benefits for the health of the ecosystems upon which humans depend, but some more than others. The main success story of the Convention on Wetlands is its **List of Wetlands of International Importance, the “Ramsar List”**. Member countries have the obligation to include sites in the List and to formulate and implement their planning so as to preserve the ecological character – in other words the good health – of their listed sites.

Over the years, the Convention has developed criteria for determining which wetlands should be considered “internationally important”, based upon their ecological and hydrological values and their importance for conserving biological diversity, so as to include them in the Ramsar List. In this way, these wetlands acquire a new status at the national

level and are recognized by the international community as being of significant value not only for the country, or the countries, where they are located, but for humanity as a whole.

As WWD 2000 draws near, the 116 member countries to the Ramsar Convention have designated more than 1000 wetlands for the Ramsar List, covering nearly 720,000 square kilometers, about the same area as Spain and the United Kingdom combined.

The suggested theme of WWD 2000, “**Celebrating Our Wetlands of International Importance**”, is a recognition that these special places have exceptional symbolic significance in capturing the public's interest and demonstrating the values and benefits that we enjoy from all wetlands.

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## The “Vision for the Ramsar List”

The Convention’s goal is to achieve Ramsar listing for as many wetlands throughout the world as meet the criteria of international importance; in the short term, the Conference of the Contracting Parties has stated its objective of having at least 2000 sites in the List by 2005, twice the current number. To bring this much of the world’s wetland resource under the umbrella of Ramsar status, the Parties urge all States to join the Convention, if they have not already done so, and to make significant efforts, first, to identify those wetlands that should be included in the List and then to proceed promptly with the scientific and political tasks of designating them. To assist governments in this

mission, in May 1999 the Conference of the Contracting Parties adopted a major policy document called the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance*.<sup>1</sup>

Everything in the Strategic Framework is founded upon this “Vision for the Ramsar List”:

**To develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the ecological and hydrological functions they perform.**

<sup>1</sup> Request your hard copy of Ramsar Handbook No. 7 or consult the Strategic Framework in Ramsar Web site at [http://ramsar.org/key\\_res\\_vii.11e.htm](http://ramsar.org/key_res_vii.11e.htm)

## The Global Network of Wetlands

According to the Strategic Framework, there are four priority objectives for the Ramsar List in constructing this Global Network of internationally recognized wetlands:

1. To establish national networks of Ramsar sites in each Contracting Party which fully represent the diversity of wetlands and their key ecological and hydrological functions.
2. To contribute to maintaining global biological diversity through the designation and management of appropriate wetland sites.

3. To foster cooperation among Contracting Parties, the Convention’s International Organization Partners, and local stakeholders in the selection, designation, and management of Ramsar sites.

4. To use the Ramsar site network as a tool to promote national, supranational/ regional, and international cooperation in relation to complementary environment treaties.



## National wetlands and the global picture

To achieve this vision of the sustainable use of the world’s wetlands by establishing a Global Network of especially important wetlands, as well as the “wise use” management of all wetlands, continues to require the best efforts of governments, NGOs, academic institutions, the media, and citizen groups at all levels, from local to national to international.

**“Celebrating Our Wetlands of International Importance”** on World Wetlands Day, 2 February 2000, by any means that may seem most effective and most feasible in any given situation, will help to raise the public’s consciousness of the vast benefits that wetlands hold for people and

the urgency with which they must be protected from loss and degradation.

World Wetlands Day 2000 is an occasion to celebrate **all** your wetlands of international importance, regardless of whether or not they have already been included in the Ramsar List. In fact, for those not yet included in the List, celebrating them could be a way to encourage their listing. Celebrating all wetlands of international importance on 2 February 2000 will greatly help the Convention to achieve the target of 2000 wetland sites in the Ramsar List by the year 2005.

**The Bureau of the Convention on Wetlands encourages all interested people to report their World Wetlands Day activities to the Bureau (e-mail [ramsar@ramsar.org](mailto:ramsar@ramsar.org)), either their plans before WWD or the results afterward, or both. The staff of the secretariat will make every effort to post these notices on the Ramsar Web site (<http://ramsar.org/>)**

