

WWD 2013 Report and photos from:
Mr. Pankaj Chandan.
Head
High Altitude Wetlands Conservation Programme.
WWF-India

The Department of Wildlife Protection, Govt. of J&K in collaboration with World Wide Fund for nature-India (WWF-India) and Department of Environment and Remote Sensing, Govt. of J&K organized World Wetlands Day at Mansar Wetland, a Ramsar Site, in Jammu. The programme was attended by a diverse audience including school students, members of *panchayat*, scientists, academicians, conservationists, officials from different Govt. departments and common masses. Dr. Manohar Lal Sharma, Hon'ble Minister of State for Forests, Environment & Ecology was the Chief Guest of the event. The programme started with a welcome address by Mr. Saleem-ul-Haq, Wildlife Warden, who welcomed the guests and gave an overview of the programme. Mr. Pankaj Chandan, Head, Himalayan Wetlands Conservation Programme, during his address talked about the background of the World Wetlands Day and also underlined its significance. He highlighted the importance of wetlands & their significance in human life. He also said that wetlands apart from providing multiple benefits to human society also act as important wildlife refuges and must be conserved for that. He also informed the gathering that WWF is working for the sustainable conservation of wetlands through good science and policy & advocacy both nationally and internationally. Dr. Deepika Salathia, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Environmental Sciences, University of Jammu, spoke about the services provided by the twin wetlands of Mansar and Surinsar and their relevance for local communities. She suggested that there is need for social awakening as the first step towards sustainable conservation of these wetlands. Dr. O.P. Sharma, IFS, Chief Conservator of Forests (Ecotourism) underlined the threats that jeopardize the existence of wetlands in the so called modernized world. He suggested looking back to Vedas and religious texts for the guidance for sustainable use of wetlands and water resources.

Sh. Suresh Chough, IFS, Director, Department of Environment and Remote Sensing, Govt. of J&K, highlighted the role of Mansar and Surinsar wetlands as an important source of water in the surrounding *Kandi* belt. He also informed that the Department of Environment and Remote Sensing was engaged in conservation of wetlands across the state. Dr. Manohar Lal Sharma, Hon'ble Minister of State for Forests, Environment & Ecology during his address pressed upon the need for involvement of the local communities in conservation of wetlands. He highlighted the role played by communities in various prominent environmental movements of India. The Hon'ble Minister also assured that the Government of J&K shall strive hard to ensure that the wetlands of J&K are conserved and maintained in the best of their states. He called upon common masses to shun the ways of greed which ultimately lead to over-exploitation of our common resources including wetlands.

On this occasion a symposium on the importance of wetlands was also organized in which Ms. Priya Sharma, Mr. Jeevan Lal and Ms. Poonam Sarmal received first second and third prizes respectively. As a run-up to the World Wetlands Day, WWF-India and Department of Wildlife Protection also organized a drawing and painting competition at Govt. Hr. Sec. School, Mansar. Three prize winners in drawing and painting competition were Ms. Roshni Banoo (1st), Ms. Shiwani Sharma (2nd) and Mr. Rohit Verma (3rd). A group of students from Higher Secondary School, Mansar also present a skit before the audience pertaining to the issues the Mansar Wetland is facing and the role of local masses in its conservation. WWF-India also displayed the resource material developed by the organization for the education institutions and the equipment meant for the monitoring of wetland ecosystems.

The programme culminated with a formal vote-of-thanks by Sh. Asif M. Sagar, IFS, Conservator of Forests (Wildlife). He informed that the Department of Wildlife Protection along with WWF-India will keep organizing such programmes in future for the awareness of the stakeholders. He vowed to continue the efforts of the Department for the conservation of wetlands in Jammu and Kashmir. He thanked all the guests and the audience for their presence and active participation in the event. Prominent among others who were present on the occasion include Sh. S.D. Swatantra, Former PCCF, Govt. of J&K, Sh. Laiqat Ali Dar, Assistant Director, Department of Environment and Remote Sensing, Govt. of J&K, Sh. Sayeed Ahmed, Wildlife Warden, Jammu, Ms. Smeena Charoo, Research Officer, Department of Wildlife Protection, Mr. Balwant Singh, Range Officer. Mr. Rohit Rattan and Mr. Pushpinder Singh Jamwal, Project Officers, WWF-India, who are working on different wetlands in the State, were also present on the occasion.



J&K Minister of State for Forest Environment & Ecology Chairing the WWD Programme in J&K



Local School Kids near a Ramsar wetland in J&K celebrating WWD 2013



Mansar Wetland site managers during WWD 2013