

World Wetlands Day 2002 and The cultural heritage of wetlands

A call for contributions and an invitation to action

Much of the world's wealth of archaeological and cultural heritage is closely associated with the natural richness of its wetlands. Ancient civilizations developed on major rivers and their associated wetlands, and many people continue to depend upon their resources of water, food and other materials and their many vital functions for safeguarding human welfare.

Wetlands are thus a storehouse of cultural heritage which takes many forms, from human-made physical structures and artefacts, palaeontological records in sediments and peat, and traditional water and land-use management practices, to places of religious and mythological significance and the intangible 'sense of place' felt by many for these wild and often mysterious sites and their wildlife.

Despite the great significance of wetlands for wildlife and people, loss and damage continue. Throughout its history, the work of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands has emphasized the importance of people in conservation efforts: their livelihoods, their welfare, their traditions and beliefs, their leisure as well as their work – not only their economic and social well-being, but their "cultural heritage" as well. Increasingly, the Parties have observed that there is much common ground in the biodiversity and heritage management of wetlands.

It is fitting, then, that Standing Committee has chosen for the 8th COP (Valencia, Spain, 18-26 November 2002) the theme "Wetlands: water, life, and culture", and that one of the COP's five Technical Sessions will be on "Cultural aspects of wetlands as a tool for their conservation and sustainable use".

World Wetlands Day 2002

In order to contribute to this process, the suggested theme for the 6th World Wetlands Day, 2 February 2002, will be the same as COP8's: "Wetlands: water, life, and culture". Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, site managers and citizens are invited to explore cultural issues in their national and local contexts and seek to make their publics more aware of the cultural as well as the natural values of their wetlands.

Already the Ramsar Bureau and its collaborators are developing materials – posters, information packs, and other items – that will help to get the message across. Watch for further news as these aids become ready for distribution in October 2001. Participants in next year's WWD will also wish to begin planning early.

The Ramsar Bureau would warmly welcome examples of the cultural values of particular wetlands around the world, preferably with good photographs, for potential use in some of the items we are developing and for reprinting with acknowledgement on the Ramsar Web site. Materials of all sorts, from case studies to photographs to artwork to music, will help to enrich our coverage of this vital part of the experience of wetlands. Please contact Sandra Hails, hails@ramsar.org, with any suggestions you might have.

With best regards,

**Delmar Blasco
Secretary General**