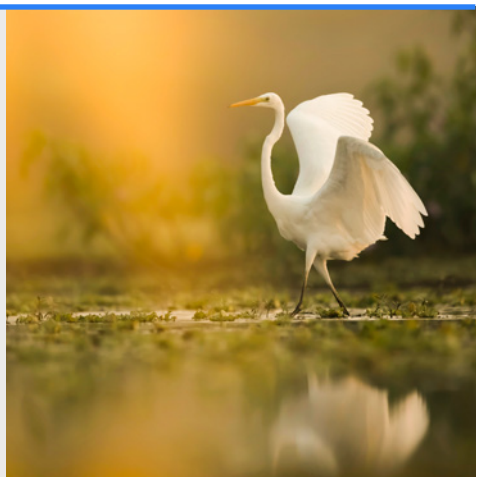
WETLANDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Life thrives in wetlands. These incredible ecosystems support a tapestry of biodiversity upon which we all depend. Wetlands biodiversity provides food, clean water and jobs, while protecting communities from floods and storms and even mitigating the impacts of climate change. But, despite these benefits, humanity is destroying wetlands at an alarming rate and 25% of wetland species are today threatened with extinction. Urgent action is needed to halt and reverse wetlands biodiversity loss as part of humanity's response to the global nature crisis.



WHY WETLANDS BIODIVERSITY MATTERS

Wetlands are rich reservoirs of biodiversity that are vital for humanity and nature to thrive. About 40% of the world's plant and animal species depend on wetlands, including 30% of all known fish species. Over 100,000 freshwater species have been identified in wetlands so far, with 200 new ones discovered annually. Wetlands are home to many threatened amphibians and reptiles, host migratory and resident water birds, and nurture thousands of plant species. Coastal wetlands, like mangroves and coral reefs, are among the most biologically diverse places on Earth, while many endemic species are only found in a specific wetland area.

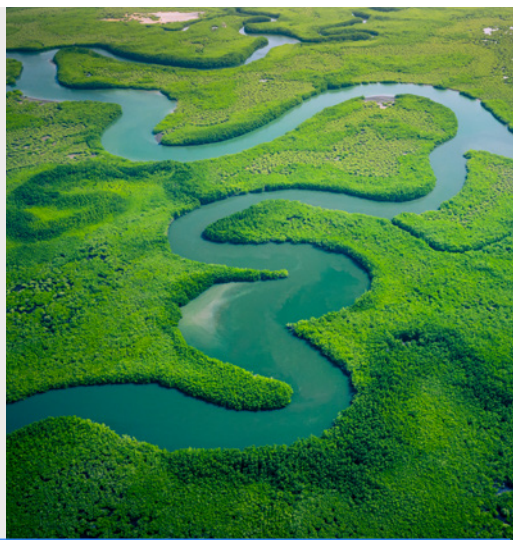
It is impossible to exaggerate how important wetland biodiversity is for both the healthy functioning of our planet and sustainable human development.

For example:

- **Swamp vegetation** *filters pollutants, making water potable*
- **Wetlands provide livelihoods** *for one billion people and help feed the world*
- **Peatlands store 30%** *of all land-based carbon, helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change*
- **Lakes and rivers supply food** *and medicine*
- **Mangroves and coral reefs** *protect coastal communities during storm surges, hurricanes and tsunamis*
- **Wetlands provide ecosystem services** *worth US$47 trillion annually, more than those from forests, deserts or grasslands.*

WHAT ARE WETLANDS?

Wetlands are a major, planet-wide habitat that make life on Earth possible. Article 1.1 of the Convention on Wetlands defines wetlands as: "areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres." They are ecosystems where water is the primary factor controlling the environment and the associated plant and animal life. This encompasses all inland wetlands, such as marshes, ponds, lakes, fens, rivers, floodplains, and swamps; a range of coastal wetlands, including saltwater marshes, estuaries, mangroves, lagoons, and coral reefs; and human-made wetlands like fishponds, rice paddies, and salt pans. Global inland and coastal wetlands cover over 12.1 million km^2, an area larger than Canada.



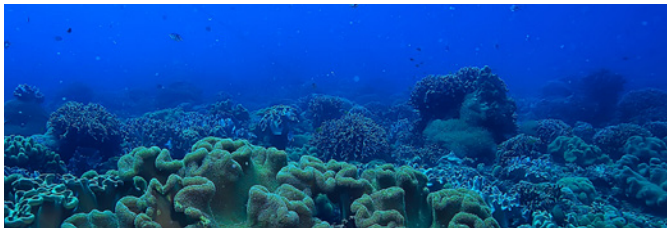
WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

Humans are destroying wetlands. About 35% of the world's wetlands have disappeared since the 1970s; 87% have been lost since the 1700s. The wetlands that remain are vanishing three times faster than forests. There are multiple drivers of wetland loss, including widespread drainage and infilling for agriculture and construction, pollution, overexploitation of resources (e.g. overfishing), invasive species and climate change.

As a direct result of alarming rates of wetland destruction, biodiversity is in steep decline.

- **Between 1970 and 2014**, *populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles decreased by 60%.*
- **Since 1970**, *81% of inland wetland species and 36% of coastal and marine species have declined.*
- **25% of wetland species** *are threatened with extinction, including water birds, freshwater dependent mammals, marine turtles, and coral reef- building species.*

Wetland biodiversity loss is a major component of the global nature emergency engulfing our planet. Today, species are declining faster than at any time in human history and the pace is accelerating, with wetland species declining most. One million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction and climate change is making it worse. Biodiversity loss denotes the unprecedented disappearance, degradation and unsustainable use of the ecosystems which humanity – and all other living things – depend on to survive and thrive. Citizens, NGOs, and governments are working to reverse the current destructive trends – but we are not doing nearly enough.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

The scale of the global nature crisis demands an ambitious global roadmap for biodiversity to provide the impetus for new thinking and unprecedented action. In particular, governments and other stakeholders must acknowledge wetlands' critical role for biodiversity and the solutions they provide on climate change and sustainable development. It is time to fulfil longstanding commitments to stop the loss of the world's wetlands and the biodiversity they host, including the pledge made under Sustainable Development Goal 15, to halt and reverse land degradation and stop biodiversity loss. To achieve this, we must:

- **Restore, conserve and promote** *the wise use of all wetlands*
- **Stop draining**, *building over and degrading wetlands*
- **Assess the real value** *of wetlands*
- **Raise awareness and educate** *people about the benefits of wetlands and the threats they face.*

This is a collective, global responsibility and everyone can play a part. Find out more about the wetlands near where you live and get involved. Join or set up a project or campaign aimed at raising awareness about the importance of wetlands biodiversity. Ensure that your local and national representatives are prioritizing wetlands protection and restoration in their planning.

Decisions and actions must be taken now to make sure we have the wetlands biodiversity needed for both people and our planet to thrive today and in the future.

THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

Adopted in Ramsar, Iran in 1971, the Convention on Wetlands is the only global treaty to focus on a single ecosystem. Its 171 Contracting Parties commit to:

- **Designate wetlands of high value on the list of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), and**
- **Use all wetlands wisely and cooperate on transboundary issues.**

Today there are 2,400 designated Ramsar Sites, covering a total surface area of over 250 million hectares (an area slightly larger than Algeria). The network of Ramsar Sites includes coastal and inland wetlands of all types. The Convention on Wetlands is working to reverse wetland loss and degradation around the world. The Convention supports sustainable development, disaster resilience, and climate action, contributing to 16 different Sustainable Development Goals.