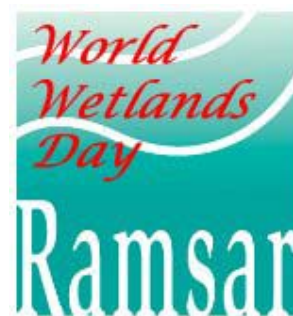


The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

World Wetlands Day 2005



"There's wealth in wetland diversity - don't lose it!"

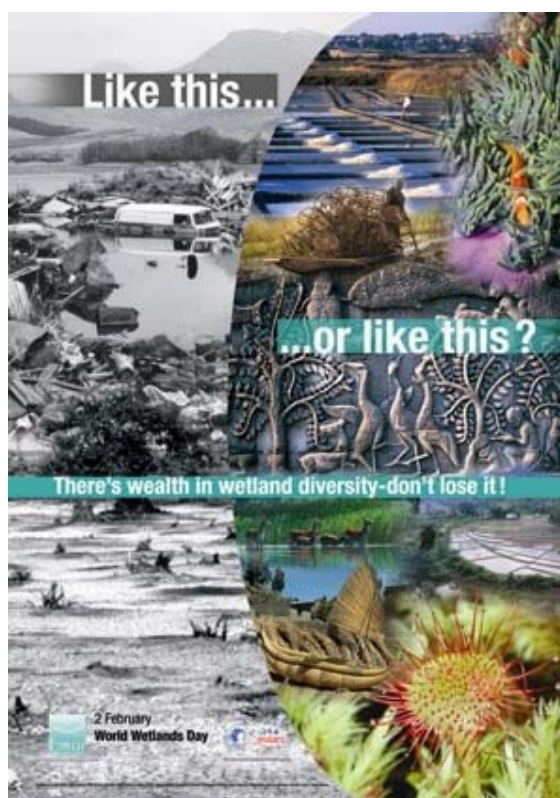
Our theme for World Wetlands Day 2005 is the cultural and biological diversity of wetlands and we have used the slogan **There's wealth in wetland diversity - don't lose it!** to reflect this on the enclosed poster and stickers. We hope you will find this focus and the materials useful in your activities for WWD this coming February.

The cultural and biological diversity of wetlands together represent a natural wealth that sustains us both physically and emotionally. The cultural heritage in our wetlands is the result of the millennia-long association between people and wetlands, an association that has brought "wealth" to past generations and, with your help, will continue to do so for future generations. It's an association that developed because of the utility of wetlands - in short, the diversity of wetland plant and animal life has provided sustenance as well as many other benefits for people.

The images on the poster and stickers were chosen to represent the cultural and biological diversity of wetlands on one side, with a colourful, vibrant series of images, and on the other side, the result of "losing" this wealth, through wetland pollution and destruction.

The family of Yezo Sika deer at the Kushiro Marsh Ramsar Site in Japan; the clown fish, endemic to the Maldive Islands, hiding in the tentacles of a sea anemone on a coral reef; and the diminutive sundew, a tiny insectivorous plant that inhabits peat bogs (in this case in Slovakia), are testimony to the beauty of the biological diversity in our wetlands. The rice terraces in Laos and the artisanal salt extraction at the Marais salants de Guérande et du Més Ramsar Site in France illustrate the cultural landscapes created by human use of wetlands, while the totora boat from the Suriqui community at the Lake Titicaca Ramsar Site in Bolivia and the fish traps at Hadejia-Nguru wetlands, a Ramsar site in Nigeria, demonstrate the ingenuity of humans in using wetland plants to construct boats and fishing gear for exploiting the wealth of wetlands. And finally, the carved stone in the centre of the poster comes from the ancient Angkor Wat complex in Cambodia, constructed during the 11-13th centuries - this particular cameo in the temple wall is evidence of the close association between humans and wetland species, and it's yet another example of the cultural heritage associated with our wetlands through their utility to people.

We hope you will join with us on 2nd February and celebrate the wealth in the diversity of your wetlands.





CELEBRATING THE WORLD WETLANDS DAY: 2005

Theme: "There's wealth in Wetland diversity- don't lose it!"

Prepared by Maria Moate

WHAT IS A WETLAND?

Wetlands are areas where water is the primary factor controlling the environment and the associated plant and animal life. They occur where the water table is at or near the surface of the land, or where the land is covered by shallow water.

The Ramsar Convention takes a broad approach in determining the wetlands, which come under its aegis. Under the text of the Convention (Article 1.1), wetlands are defined 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".

In addition, the Convention (Article 2.1) provides that wetlands:

"may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands".

As a result of these provisions, the coverage of the Convention extends to a wide variety of habitat types, including rivers and lakes, coastal lagoons, mangroves, peatlands, and even coral reefs.

In addition there are **human-made wetlands** such as fish and shrimp ponds, farm ponds, irrigated agricultural land, salt pans, reservoirs, gravel pits, sewage farms, and canals.

Wetlands are known by many names:

- Seeps
- Marshes
- Pans
- Ponds
- Swamp forests
- Coral reef
- Lagoon
- Delta
- Bog
- Hummocked meadow
- Pothole
- Springs
- Floodplains
- Lakes
- Dams
- Estuary
- Stream banks (riparian areas)
- Vlei
- Mangrove
- Sponges
- Moor
- Glade
- Slough
- Quagmire
- Flat
- Muskeg

ABOUT THE THEME

*The theme, **There's wealth in Wetland diversity- don't lose it!** features a critical link between the cultural and biological diversities: many of the world's wetlands owe their existence and continued vitality to cultural practices, or are conserved because of cultural needs. Thus maintenance of biological diversity in wetlands is often closely linked with the lives and beliefs of people. Of course, the other side of the coin is that people can misuse wetlands and cause loss and damage to the biological diversity - and at the same time to cultural diversity!* **Message from the Ramsar Convention**

Secretary General

National Celebration

The national celebration of the World Wetlands Day, 2005 is at the swamp near Underberg, KwaZulu-Natal. The Swamp, which extends for over 500 ha adjacent to the Pholela River, is one of the priority wetlands of KwaZulu-Natal. Not only is the area scenically beautiful, but the wetland is rich both from a biodiversity and cultural perspective. It supports a diversity of fauna and flora, including breeding Crowned Carnes. The wetland provides incema (*Cyperus marginatus*), which is used by local crafters to weave a variety of traditional items such as beer strainers and sleeping mats.

Furthermore, wetland rehabilitation measures were undertaken in The Swamp about 20 years ago and the wetland therefore provides an interesting demonstration of the long-term outcomes of wetland rehabilitation. The Swamp is also under diverse ownership, including portions owned by the Enhlanhleni community with its 800 plus residents through a Community Property Association, the Swamp Nature Reserve

managed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and the Reichenau Mission of the Diocese of Mariannhill that was established in 1886.

The Women's Leadership and Training Programme, an NGO based at the Mission, works very closely with the Enhlanhleni community and other nearby communities, and some of the initiatives that this NGO is supporting that are linked in some way with the wetland include:

- Ikhwezi Crafts, a co-operative of crafters whose work includes weaving of incema and ukhasi from The Swamp
- Reichenau Cultural and Eco-tourism through which local youth have been trained as guides, links have been forged with broader tourism initiatives in the Underberg area and a trail along the Pholela is being developed. The trail cooperative has removed invasive species in the wetlands and verges of the Pholela River, and thatch has been harvested.
- The establishment of Environmental Clubs in historically disadvantaged communities located in the Southern Drakensberg. Awareness about wetlands and cranes has been raised and the Swamp has been used as an outdoor classroom.
- The Reichenau Catering and Hospitality Group, who are very well positioned to cater for a World Wetlands Day Event at Reichenau.
- Masidle Phansi, a permaculture training project to encourage communities to establish home and market gardens using organic methods of agriculture and conservation principles.

The Swamp provides an excellent venue for highlighting the biological and cultural diversity of wetlands in general. It also provides a good opportunity for showcasing a practical example of how a diversity of different local groups and service organizations can work together for social upliftment and safeguarding of the natural environment, including wetlands. This event would also serve to encourage the community-based groups to build on their achievements thus far. Some of these initiatives are still in their infancy and if the event were able to catalyse further resources in terms of training, product development and marketing then this would be a further spin-off of the event.

WHAT ARE THE THREATS TO WETLANDS?

Many people have fears for wetlands as they associate them with diseases, danger and are therefore seen as wasteland that need to be converted to farming land, pastures or for industrial purposes or even drained to control malaria. Therefore all wetlands are threatened through various uses and some have virtually disappeared.

- Disturbance of habitat (bird and animal mortality, loss of refuge due to reclamation, dredging, channelling and drainage of wetlands for agricultural, industrial, commercial, harbour and residential developments)
 - Unsustainable water extraction for irrigation causing streams to stop flowing in winter
 - Dam building
 - Burst dams causing flood damage and sediment release
 - Trout dams which introduce competition of alien fish with indigenous species
 - Timber production
 - Crop production- planting of species with a low wetness tolerance band which lower the water table
 - Poorly managed burning regimes-
 - Sub-surface fires (alteration of hydrological and erosion control values)
 - Frequency and timing of burning (transpiration loss, wind exposure and radiation)
 - Wetlands used as firebreaks
 - Poorly managed mowing
 - Hay production (loss of species diversity, loss of animal and bird cover during the breeding season)
 - Tillage and ploughing
 - Poorly managed grazing
 - Soil compaction (loss of water purity, loss of infiltration capacity)
 - Overgrazing
 - Trampling (exposure, evapo-transpiration)
 - Cattle trails at key points (soil erosion and headcuts)
 - Deposition of urine and faeces (water pollution)
 - Fallow lands adjacent to wetlands encourage alien plant growth
 - Leaching and loading of nutrients causing light and oxygen depletion
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- Release of pesticides and herbicides
- Mining
- Effluent pollution from cities
- Road and bridge building
- Mangrove destruction through siltation
- Siltation through deforestation
- Afforestation drying up the groundwater sources and lowering the water table
- Over cutting for peat for the horticulture industry

WHY ARE WETLANDS SO IMPORTANT?

Ecological Values

Wetlands support life by providing shelter and habitat for a multitude of animals of insects, birds mammals, reptiles and amphibians. It serves as a nursery for salty and freshwater fishes while controlling erosion and stabilizing the shoreline -reduction of wave and current energy.

Hydrological Values

Groundwater Recharge /Flood Busters

Wetlands reduce the speed of water flowing from rivers as the water spread out on reaching the wetland. This greatly reduces flood damage, particularly erosion and by storing water like a sponge and releasing it slowly downstream.

- Floods attenuation-dissipating flood energy- quick recovery from flood damage
- Storing of water and slowly releasing it
- Stream flow enhancement and regulation
- Feeding of aquifers

Water Purification / Filters

Wetlands improve water quality as they are very good natural filters, trapping sediments, nutrients and even pathogenic bacteria.

- Suspended sediment removal-trapping and binding sediment
 - Photo degradation of pollutants –speeding up the breakdown of pollutants
 - Dentrification and phosphorous removal-converting nitrates to atmospheric nitrogen which is not a pollution hazard- prevention of eutropication
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- Mineral uptake by vegetation
- Heavy metal retention - holding ability
- Decomposition of organic pollutants
- Bio-geochemical recycling- carbon sinks (storage), information bank –pollen, insects, stems and leaves
- Trap disease-cause in bacteria and viruses

People and Wetlands

Over centuries, wetlands have been used for grazing domestic stock and crop production. It provided reeds used for thatching in hut construction and basket weaving.

Recreation and Tourism: Wetlands are appreciated for their beauty as open spaces and for their educational and recreational value as in boating. They provided an opportunity to observe wildlife especially for bird watching, game viewing, fishing and hunting. They provided medicinal resources such as traditional medicine (muti) and a means of transport.

What you can do

- Various organizations locally and internationally run wetland conservation programmes visit their websites and subscribe to their newsletters.
- Know the wetlands around your area and identify species living there.
- Report abuse of wetlands to local conservation bodies or your local municipality
- Form clubs and make a difference in conserving wetlands

Did you know?

- *Wetlands Day is celebrated on 2 February each year.*
 - 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
 - There are presently 144 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1401 wetland sites, totaling 122.8 million hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.
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