Winners of the Eighth Edition of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards

17 June 2022

The Ramsar Wetlands Conservation Awards recognize the contributions of individuals, organizations, and governments around the world to promote conservation and wise use of wetlands. The Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands is pleased to announce the award recipients of the categories in the eighth edition as follows:

Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for Wise use recognizing significant contributions to the long-term sustainable use of wetlands.

Mr. Masayuki Kurechi, **Board Member of Ramsar Network Japan**, is recognized for his long-term commitment to the Asian-Australasian flyways and conservation of migratory birds, which has helped to restore endangered bird species.

Mr. Kurechi has committed to supporting the conservation of migratory birds that live and breed in wetlands for more than 40 years. Working with researchers from the United States and Russia, he has helped to restore multiple endangered bird species. Thanks to his efforts, some species have started migrating back to Japan, after ceasing to do so. His recent work focuses on conservation efforts along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

In addition, Mr. Kurechi is commended for his contribution to reconciling agriculture with sustainable wetland practices. He was instrumental as one of the key members of the drafting group in the adoption of Resolution X.31 "Enhancing Biodiversity in Rice Paddies as Wetland Systems" at the tenth Conference of the Parties of the Ramsar Convention held in Changwon, South Korea in 2008. This resolution acknowledged rice paddies as important wetland ecosystems and is contributing to mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation via agricultural practices. Mr. Kurechi has also supported the implementation of Resolution X.31 via his devoted efforts to enhance biodiversity in rice paddies, especially at the Ramsar site Kabukuri-numa in northern Japan.

The Ramsar Convention Award for Wetland Innovation contributed to the conservation and wise use of wetlands through an innovative technique or approach.
Ms. Carla Ximena Giraldo Malca, Peru, is recognized for her work with the Municipal Authority to the sustainability of the Pantanos de Villa wetland. Her contributions have helped to ensure that the voice of children as “Guardians of the Pantanos de Villa” wetland is recognized and that they are included by law in decisions to protect these marshlands.

The Pantanos de Villa in the centre of Lima, Peru, is a critical habitat for endangered species and ecosystem services for local communities. Today, it is under threat from human-induced activities that affect its ecological character. Six out of ten people who visited the Pantanos de Villa were children, yet they were excluded from discussions or proposals relating to its conservation.

Since 2019, the Municipal Authority of Pantanos de Villa, in coordination with the Metropolitan Municipality of Lima, has been promoting the practice of “Guardians of the Pantanos de Villa”. This is the first scheme in Peru, and one of the first in the world, that provides children a voice to act in favour of the Conservation of a natural area. In the “Guardians of the Pantanos de Villa”, article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been fulfilled.

The Ramsar Convention Award for Young Wetland Champions, recognizing young people between 18 and 30 years old that have contributed to the wise use of wetlands.

Fernanda Samuel, National Coordinator of Mangrove Protection and Restoration, is recognized for her continued efforts to protect and restore mangrove wetlands off the coast of Angola.

Fernanda Samuel’s mangrove restoration efforts have contributed to improving the livelihoods of the fishing communities and inspired many individuals including representatives from local government, entrepreneurs and at the highest level of government to join her.

In four years of work, Ms Samuel, convinced several entrepreneurs to stop building over their mangrove developments and inspired the local government to rethink the delivery of permits for the construction of infrastructure in the mangrove areas. She prevented more than 17,000 hectares of mangroves from being destroyed for construction of ports, and factories in the oil industry. With the help of more than 4500 volunteers an estimated 3,000 hectares of mangroves have been restored through the organized clean-up and reforestation campaigns.

These restoration efforts have resulted in the return of migratory birds and fishing communities, who are benefiting from the return of fish, crustaceans and molluscs. Ms Samuel inspired the Vice President of the
Republic of Angola to join the protection of the mangroves and together they have accepted a joint challenge to plant up to one million mangroves along the Angolan coast.

Merit Award recognizing long-term contribution or commitment to the conservation and wise use of wetlands and to Ramsar principles.

Jérôme Bignon, Président de l’Association Ramsar France, is recognized for his dedicated and long-term contribution in various roles towards the conservation of wetlands in France by championing laws that improve the conservation of wetlands.

Jérôme Bignon has worked all his life for the preservation of natural areas, particularly marine, coastal and wetland environments. As an elected official in his local area, the Somme and the Picardy region in the north of France, he worked through his many local mandates (mayor, departmental councillor, regional councillor) to ensure that these ecosystems were considered.

Mr Bignon defended his convictions about the conservation of wetlands nationally, as a long-time member of the National Assembly and then of the Senate, in particular by contributing to the law of 14 April 2006 on national parks and as the rapporteur for the law of 8 August 2016 for the restoration of biodiversity.

In addition, Mr. Bignon with his colleague, Mrs Frédérique Tuffnell, drafted the report “Terres d’eau, terres d’avenir: Faire de nos zones humides des territoires pionniers de la transition écologique” (Land of water, land of the future: Making our wetlands pioneers of the ecological transition) submitted to the Prime Minister of France on World Wetlands Day 2019.

He remains committed even while in retirement continuing to raise awareness about wetlands among elected officials as well as citizens and has served as the chair of the Association Ramsar France since it was established.

“We need collective action from all of society to halt loss of wetlands and conserve and restore their services for people and nature. The winners of the Ramsar Awards 2022 have shown exceptional leadership in pioneering wetlands science and conservation to safeguard wetlands”, said Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands. “At this pivotal moment to scale up nature-based solutions for people and planet, commitments such as these are inspiring communities, researchers, governments and businesses to commit to wetlands action for sustainable and healthy societies”, she added.

The Secretariat and the Parties to the Convention would like to commend the commitment and support of Danone for this important award. Winners in the categories of Wise Use, Innovation and Young Wetlands Champions Awards will each receive the Evian Special Prize of USD 10,000 provided by Danone and will be honoured at an Award ceremony to be held at the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP14) in November 2022.