

WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2000

CELEBRATING OUR WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

A message from the Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands

We are entering the 21st Century with 1013 sites inscribed by 117 countries in the List of Wetlands of International Importance. They range from the 1 hectare unique mangrove ecosystem on Christmas Island (Australia) to the 6.8 million hectares of the Okavango Delta System in Botswana; from the Rasmussen Lowlands near the Arctic Polar Circle in Canada, to the Atlantic Coast Reserve in Tierra del Fuego, Argentina; from the Skocjan Caves in Slovenia to the Asraq Oasis of Jordan.

In the almost 80 million hectares covered by all these sites of particular importance, there are all sorts of wet habitats, inhabited by an impressive array of species. They provide significant benefits to humanity in general because of the ecological functions they perform in the global ecosystem. Locally, in many cases they also provide renewable resources that are of economic and social importance. Frequently, they are key components of water systems, helping to satisfy environmental and human needs.

This World Wetlands Day provides an occasion to celebrate our Wetlands of International Importance. They deserve such celebration. And not only the 1011 sites that are already in the Ramsar List, but also all the many others that fully qualify for inclusion in the List but have not yet been designated. The Convention's target is to have 2000 listed sites by 2005. World Wetlands Day 2000 provides a good occasion to advance towards that target and help to achieve the 'Vision for the Ramsar List': *"to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the ecological and hydrological functions they perform"*.

I invite you to make people in your country more fully aware of the treasures that they have in their wetlands already included in the Ramsar List and in those that could be listed.

At the same time, do not forget the other wetlands, those which might not qualify for inclusion in the List but which are nonetheless very significant for the people around them. They, too, deserve to be celebrated – their conservation and sustainable use may well be as important for local communities as is the caring for the mega-sites. As in all other aspects of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, people's involvement is the only good recipe for long-lasting solutions.

Celebrating wetlands is celebrating life on Earth, it is celebrating the invisible but essential link that exists between us, as human beings, and the rest of this apparently unique and complex phenomenon in the universe.

Delmar Blasco
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