

## World Wetlands Day 2003

**No wetlands - No water!**

### 2003 - International Year of Freshwater

The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in August of 2002 prompted the media to highlight some alarming statistics - 1.1 billion people without access to safe freshwater, 1.7 billion living in water scarce areas, and 1.3 billion living in extreme poverty. The focus will continue in 2003 as the 3rd World Water Forum in Japan in March 2003 takes over from the Summit in searching for solutions to freshwater issues and should continue throughout the year with the UN decision to make 2003 the **International Year of Freshwater**.



This media attention presents a great opportunity for all of us - the Ramsar Bureau and you, the extended Ramsar family, to deliver our message. A major concern with the current attention given to freshwater issues is the lack of emphasis on the role of wetlands in providing solutions. Read through the Summit material- you will find many references to the need to maintain the health of our natural ecosystems but little reference to the critical role of wetlands. Yet wetlands are a vital component of the freshwater cycle. Their conservation and sustainable use **must** be an integral part of any solution to the freshwater crisis. Wetlands are the providers of freshwater, both in quantity and quality, so maintaining healthy freshwater wetlands means securing water supply. And don't let us forget about the many other resources and services provided by our freshwater wetlands that go well beyond freshwater supply, providing the basis for sustainable livelihoods in rural areas and thus a part of the solution to rural poverty.

A second part of our message must be that wetlands are both **PROVIDERS** and **USERS** of freshwater. As freshwater allocation becomes a challenging issue for national governments in their search for the elusive balance between agricultural, industrial and domestic demands for water, we must emphasize that wetlands **NEED** water if they are to maintain their structure and function. If they are to continue to deliver freshwater and contribute to sustainable lifestyles, they too need to be "allocated" water, and as a first priority. What can you do? Join with us on World Wetlands Day 2003 in delivering these two messages to decision makers, the public and schoolchildren. The Bureau's WWD materials this year include **an information poster on freshwater with a background paper** giving you more information on the issues involved, **a new leaflet that celebrates the diversity and value of Ramsar sites**, and **a series of 8 stickers featuring wetlands**.

Available in mid-December will be a new Ramsar video in English, French and Spanish highlighting the value of wetlands and the work of the Convention. With the relatively high cost of reproducing the videos, it will not be possible to send a copy to everyone, so we encourage you to request a copy only if you plan to show this video to fairly large groups of people and on a fairly regular basis. We are also producing an international version of the video so that interested persons and organizations can produce local language versions if they wish.

With our heavy commitment in staff time for COP8 in Valencia through November, we're sure you will be patient if your requests for more materials are not dealt with immediately. Happy preparations for World Wetlands Day!