

World Wetlands Day 2004 – Wetlands at Work for Us

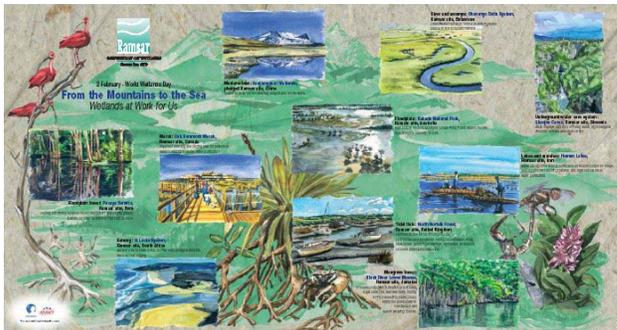
World Wetlands Day is celebrated each year throughout the world on 2nd February. This day marks the signing of the Convention on Wetlands (also known as the Ramsar Convention) on 2nd February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. Although Namibia joined the rest of the world or those countries that acceded to the convention in commemorating the day on 2nd February, we only acceded to the convention on 23 December 1995.

The day is commemorated to raise awareness and promote the wise use of our wetland, to draw attention to the values and benefits that we derive from our wetlands and to enhance the peoples understanding and shared responsibility for wetlands. Wetlands provide us with natural resources such as the water we drink and use in agriculture, industries, etc., the vegetation we use as food, medicines, building material, etc., the animals, such as marine and freshwater fish that we eat and other wildlife that congregates around wetland areas, and we carry out agricultural activities on floodplains since the sediments deposited in floodplains are rich in nutrients. Wetlands also provide us with essential ecological services such as attenuation of floods, erosion prevention, underground water recharge, water quality improvement, climate stabilisation and the formation of linear oases in arid areas.



Vegetation of the Okavango River

This year World Wetlands Day was commemorated under the theme “*From Mountains to the Sea – Wetlands at Work for Us*”. This year we decided to combine our resources and commemorate World Wetlands Day jointly with World Water Day, which theme for this year is “*Water and Disasters*”, and we slightly modified the themes for the two days to reflect this joint commemoration as “*Celebrating Water – wetlands at work for us in their role in preventing flood disasters*”.



Ramsar's Wetlands Poster - 2004



A wetland at work

School quizzes have been planned between different schools as activities for this year's joint commemoration of World Wetlands Day – World Water Day and each participating team consisted of four learners from a school targeting grade 8's and 9's. The activities started with a school quiz at the coast on 2nd February 2004, which was contested by Duneside High School, Westside High School and Kuisebmond High School and Duneside came out victorious. This was followed by school quizzes in Windhoek and Mariental on 10th March 2004. The school quiz in Windhoek was contested by St. Pauls College, Augustineum Senior Secondary School and Concordia College, and Augustineum was the winner.



The team of Augustineum



The team of Concordia College

The one in Mariental was contested by Mariental High School and Empelheim Junior Secondary School and the former came out victorious. The next school quiz will be held in Rundu on 15th March 2004 and will be contested by Sauyemwa Combined School, Leezi Hakusembe Senior Secondary School and Maria Mwegene Senior Secondary School.

School quizzes were preceded by a publication of a poster on Namibian wetlands, produced by the Namibia Nature Foundation and a weekly media coverage using the Namibian Youth Paper, to inform and prepare the youth about the quizzes, and this media coverage will continue until all planned activities have been completed. Another highlight of the activities was a radio talk about wetlands and water, which was broadcasted on NBC National Radio on Tuesday 3rd February 2004.

The school competitions will be completed with a debate between each of the winning teams from the Coast, Windhoek, Mariental and Rundu as part of NamWater's commemoration of World Water Day on 22nd March, a day which was declared by a United Nations General Assembly resolution to be observed in conformity with the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in *Chapter 18 of Agenda 21*. This school debate will be held at Hardap Recreation Resort in Southern Namibia. The last activity for this year will be a launch of a book on the Okavango River Basin at the end of March 2004.