



# Notes & News



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## REQUEST FOR HELP

### Changes in wetland areas – help needed!

As part of the Scientific & Technical Review Panel's (STRP) work on the Ramsar Convention's "effectiveness indicators", and in particular Indicator A on wetland extent, an STRP task group for this specific work is compiling information on quantitative trends in wetland area. It is widely recognised that a very big gap in our knowledge of wetlands is globally consistent information on wetland area, and changes in wetland area. However, there is a lot of wetland area change data and information for different specific wetlands, for different wetland types and/or for different regions, countries or parts of countries – but this is extremely scattered through published journal papers, reports and other unpublished sources: there is no one place to go to find this information, and no one person who is aware of all of it!

But we are sure that each and every one of you has, or knows of, at least one or more of these sources. So the STRP is asking everyone to help compile these data and information (even if you think such information may already have been provided to the Secretariat by other means) by sending us a copy (preferably an electronic copy) of any document which contains wetland area change (in terms of actual area, or percentage change) over any time-period for a wetland or wetlands in any part of the world, or to provide us with a web address where it can be obtained. The information we are seeking is for all types of wetlands covered by the scope of the Ramsar Convention: inland wetlands (e.g. marshes, swamps, rivers, floodplains, forested wetlands, peatlands, tundra, caves); coastal and nearshore marine systems (e.g. estuaries, mangroves, saltmarshes, tidal flats, seagrass beds, coral reefs); and human-made wetlands (e.g. rice paddies, fish and aquaculture ponds, reservoirs and impoundments).

Even if you have only a hard-copy of a relevant document, a scan of its citation and a relevant page or pages would be helpful – or you could summarise the relevant area information and send it in an email. Please ensure you make clear the source of any information you are providing. Please send any information sources you can provide to the Ramsar Secretariat's Scientific & Technical Support Officer, Ms Monica Zavagli ([zavagli@ramsar.org](mailto:zavagli@ramsar.org)). The STRP will also be looking at ways and means of making all this wetland area information more accessible in the future in relation to its related 2009–2012 task to develop a "Global Wetland Observing System".

Thank you, everyone, in advance for your help in providing sources of this wetland area information!

*Nick Davidson, Deputy Secretary General, Ramsar*

## CONSERVATION NEWS

### Mexico launches shorebird conservation strategy

Earlier this year, the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) and the Technical Subcommittee for Shorebird Conservation in Mexico published and presented the Strategy for the Conservation and Management of Shorebirds and their Habitats in Mexico. This publication is the third national shorebird conservation plan in North America, joining those published for the US and Canada (i.e. the United States Shorebird Conservation Plan and the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan). This latest shorebird strategy will promote the development of national programs and projects for the conservation and management of shorebirds and the wetland habitats they require in Mexico. More than 60 people and 40 institutions representing academic, community, government, private, and nongovernmental organizations participated in the process of developing this national strategy. The entire process was made possible through the participation of these institutions, along with support from the US Forest Service, Ducks Unlimited Inc. and SEMARNAT.

### Ramsar News

**Bolivia** has announced the extension of the *Laguna Colorado* Ramsar site, designated in 1990, from 51,000 ha to nearly 1.5 million ha. The expanded site, now renamed *Los Lípez* is located in the Bolivian Altiplano between 4,200 and 6,000 m altitude and now includes a complex of high Andean endorheic permanent saline, hypersaline and brackish lakes, as well as geothermal wetlands. These wetlands sustain such migratory birds as Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* and Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* that use the wetlands as staging sites for roosting and feeding. In addition, c.25% and 50% of the global population of the Andean flamingo *Phoenicoparrus andinus* and James's Flamingo *Phoenicoparrus jamesi*, respectively, concentrate in this area. Due to its landscape beauty and natural attractions, the site is the most visited protected area in Bolivia (c.70,000 tourist/year), which has caused negative impacts on the lakes. Mining represents another important threat. Photos can be found at: [http://www.ramsar.org/cda/ramsar/display/main/main.jsp?zn=ramsar&cp=1-26-45-84^24053\\_4000\\_0\\_\\_](http://www.ramsar.org/cda/ramsar/display/main/main.jsp?zn=ramsar&cp=1-26-45-84^24053_4000_0__).

**Senegal** has implemented measures to ensure the successful improvement of the ecological character of Ramsar site *Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj*, thereby leading to its removal from the Montreux Record of Ramsar sites under threat. This site, characterized by lakes, tidal creeks and ponds linked by a network of channels in the Senegal River floodplain, is a unique example of a near-natural wetland type, and

is recognized as supporting populations of flora and fauna important for the maintenance of the region's biodiversity. The main challenge leading to the inclusion of the Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj on the Montreux Record was due to the infestations of *Salvinia molesta*, *Pistia stratiotes* and *Paspalum vaginatum*. However, several other threats faced this site since its inclusion on the Ramsar List – these included the continual alluvial deposition leading to a notable decrease in the water level within the channels, leading to the artificial regulation of the water levels and water softening, further encouraging infestation of the channels by invasive alien species. In response to the problems being faced by the site, which threatened not only the biodiversity supported there but the sustainability of the income generating activities of the local communities (rice cultivation, livestock rearing, hunting, nature conservation and tourism), the following actions were taken: capacity building; development of an action plan; restoration; and biological control. Following these actions numerous improvements were noted, especially the increase in numbers of White-faced Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna viduata* and Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* found within the park.

**China's** 37th Wetland of International Importance is the fascinating *Hangzhou Xixi* Wetlands (325 ha), a National Wetlands Park just a few kms from the Hangzhou urban centre, south-west of Shanghai. The new site is a complex of c.400 permanent freshwater ponds connected by channels and rivers representative of both natural and human-made wetlands in Eastern China. One hundred and twenty-six species of bird have been recorded at the site, including 28 waterbirds. The site is important for nine threatened species of birds and provides breeding and feeding habitat for a large diversity of fish species, including five endemic species. The wetlands have an important function for groundwater recharge and flood mitigation for downstream Hangzhou City, and they are valued for their importance for 2000 years of cultural history. A special wetland culture has developed over the past 1000 years which combines fish ponds, silk production and mulberry trees; with its sacred Autumn-Snow Temple, the site has long been an inspiration to famous writers and poets. The site receives an average 720,000 visitors per year and is an important centre for wetland education. It is managed in accordance with ecotourism and ecological management plans.

**Mauritania** has taken the necessary steps to remove *Parc National du Diawling* from the Montreux Record of Ramsar sites under threat. This saline floodplain consists of three coastal lagoons and a freshwater lake known as Diama reservoir. A variety of factors led to the inclusion of the site on the Montreux Record, including a lack of enforcement of legislation in the surrounding areas allowing development of rice paddies in the peripheral area that discharged polluted waters near the parks, increasing population growth leading to higher demand for the water resources, etc. The main reason for its inclusion, however, was the accidental introduction of *Salvinia molesta* and *Typha australis* into the Senegal River following the flooding of a poultry farm. The colonization of the water channels led to an increased risk of eutrophication, loss of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity, and increasing challenges for supply of water to support local populations in subsistence food production.

**Brazil** has designated another small portion of the famed Pantanal wetlands for the Ramsar List. The Reserva Particular del Patrimonio Natural (RPPN) *Fazenda Rio Negro* in

Mato Grosso del Sur (7,000 ha) is a well-preserved example of the Pantanal of Nhecolândia, a subregion of the Brazilian Pantanal that is characterized by the abundant presence of freshwater or alkaline lakes, as well as permanent and intermittent rivers. The site hosts more than 400 species of plants, 350 of birds and 70 of mammals. Among them stand out threatened species, such as the Giant Otter, Marsh deer, and Hyacinth Macaw. Migratory bird species are also present in the site, e.g. *Tringa melanoleuca*, *Himantopus melanurus*, *Tachybaptus dominicus*, *Dendrocygna viduata* and *Coscoroba coscoroba*. Cattle-farming is related to two of the main threats to the site: uncontrolled fires caused by neighbouring ranches and the introduction of exotic herbs. In the area hunting and fishing are legally banned.

**Algeria** has succeeded in removing two sites from the Montreux Record of Ramsar sites under threat. *Oasis de Ouled Saïd* (25,400 ha) is an underrepresented wetland type amongst others on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance in that it is a man-made wetland. In the water-scarce harsh environment in which it is found, it plays a critical role in supporting migratory birds, ungulates such as gazelles, and other endangered species. This oasis is also vital for supporting the livelihoods of the local community through date production. *Réserve Intégrale du Lac Tonga* (2,700 ha) is part of a mosaic of wetlands including sea inlets, lakes, rivers, Scirpus marshes, dune slacks and alder thickets found in the El Kala National Park. This complex of wetlands is recognized as one of the four major wetland complexes in the Western Mediterranean.

**Chile** has designated two more high altitude Wetlands of International Importance. *Salar de Aguas Calientes IV* (15,529 ha; 3,665 m a.s.l.) is located in the deserted area of the Central Dry Puna of northern Chile. The saline lakes (salt pans) and azonal vegetation sustain a rich and abundant wildlife. Similar to the neighbouring Ramsar site "Salar de Pujasa", this wetland is a staging area (feeding and roosting) for interhemispheric migratory birds, such as sandpipers (*Calidris bairdii*, *C. melanotos*, *C. himantopus*, *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*), yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*, *T. flavipes*), and Wilson's Phalarope. Furthermore, the three high Andean flamingo species (Andean, Chilean and James's), Darwin's Rhea, Andean Goose, and Puna Tinamou, as well as the mammals short-tailed chinchilla and vicuña, are present in the area. *Salar de Pujasa* (17,397 ha; 4,530 m a.s.l.) is comparable to an oasis in the desert – although it is located in the desert area of the Central Dry Puna of northern Chile, groundwater flows to the surface naturally, which allows the formation of saline lakes (salt pans) and azonal vegetation that sustain the regional wildlife. The site constitutes one of the most important wetlands for the conservation of high Andean flamingos (Andean, Chilean and James's), which are relatively abundant in the site (more than 1% of the global population in all cases). It is also a staging area (feeding and roosting) for interhemispheric migratory birds such as sandpipers, yellowlegs, and Wilson's Phalarope.

**Burkina Faso** has designated twelve new Ramsar sites of extraordinary interest. In varied locations, from the Sahel region in the north to the Cascades region in the south-west, to the central and eastern regions, these new areas of natural as well as artificial lakes and both permanent and seasonal rivers present a wide array of ecosystem types and are of great importance to the wildlife of the region, the livelihoods of the human population in these areas, and the hydrological and climatic stability of many parts of the country. The 12



new sites bring Burkina Faso's Ramsar-listed total to 15 sites covering 652,502 ha.

The **United Kingdom** has designated two new, very large marine areas in its Overseas Territory of St Helena, Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic Ocean. **Gough Island** (229,811 ha) is one of the largest relatively unmodified cool temperate island ecosystems in the southern hemisphere. Important wetland types include non-forested peatlands, permanent freshwater pools, permanent streams, marine sub-tidal aquatic beds and rocky marine shores. The island is a strong contender for the title of the most important seabird colony in the world – a total of 22 bird species and two species of seals breed, some in very large numbers. Several bird species that breed on Gough are considered globally threatened (e.g., Sooty Albatross, Northern Rockhopper Penguin), and some are endemic to the island group (e.g., Gough Moorhen, Gough Bunting, Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross). There is a South African meteorological station on the island; other human activities include research, commercial fishery for Tristan Rock Lobster in Gough territorial waters, and limited recreational fishing under license. **Inaccessible Island** (126,524 ha) is a near-pristine cool temperate island of volcanic origin. A total of 24 species of seabirds and land birds as well as the Subantarctic Fur Seal breed there, some in very large numbers. Non-forested peatlands and rocky marine shores are critical to the survival of the breeding populations of Tristan Albatross (relict population of two or three pairs) and Spectacled Petrel (island endemic), and Northern Rockhopper Penguin and Sooty Albatross, respectively, all of which are globally threatened. Other important wetland types include permanent freshwater pools, permanent streams and marine sub-tidal aquatic beds. There is no permanent human population – from time to time small numbers of researchers and conservation management teams visit the island. Commercial fishery for Tristan Rock Lobster and limited recreational fishing under license take place in Inaccessible's territorial waters. The United Kingdom now has 168 Ramsar sites (of which 16 are in the Overseas Territories), totalling 1,274,323 ha.

**Kazakhstan** has designated a further two steppe lake systems as Wetlands of International Importance, both of them enormously significant areas particularly for migratory waterbirds. The **Naurzum Lake System** (139,714 ha), part of the Saryarka World Heritage Site, is a system of approximately 26 lakes in northern Kazakhstan and a near-natural example of an Asian steppes-region wetland with outstanding importance for birds. The lakes' cyclic hydrologic regime provides seasonal and annual diversity of fresh to saline habitats, including for the Critically Endangered Siberian Crane and 23 other threatened species, notably significant percentages of Lesser White-fronted Goose and Red-breasted Goose populations. It is a site of mass moulting for ducks and swans, nesting for 158 species, and an important stop for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds. It regularly supports more than 1% of 20 species of waterbirds. Flooding on average every 12–15 years, the Lake System is important for sustaining groundwater levels in the region. The **Zharsor-Urkash Lake System** (41,250 ha) is a system of approximately 14 lakes characteristic of the arid steppe province in northern Kazakhstan. Consisting of both saline and freshwater permanent or intermittent lakes and wet marsh habitat, the site is a regular stopping site of the Siberian Crane and habitat for 16 threatened bird species. It supports appreciable numbers of White-fronted Geese and Common Cranes, as well

as Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers along shorelines. It is an important migratory stopover for a large number of waterbirds – dominated by *Anseriformes* and *Limicolae* – and nesting habitat for 79 species. Mammals are represented by 27 species, including the Critically Endangered Saiga Antelope. Land use at the site includes hayfields, pasture, small-scale salt production, and limited hunting. Steppe fires are a threat to the ecological character of the lakes.

The **Krkonose/Karkonosze subalpine peatbogs** were added to the list of Transboundary Ramsar Sites. The Giant Mountains (Krkonose in Czech, Karkonosze in Polish) mark the natural border between **Poland** and the **Czech Republic**, form an isolated mountain range with a particular geological history, and function as a biogeographical refuge area and isolated outpost for several arctic and alpine species. The mountain habitats are the original setting of specific local cultures, traditions, legends and mysterious figures. Unfortunately, during the last phase of the 20th century's centrally-planned economics, industrial air pollution caused the large-scale dying of forests in the area. But presently the forests are growing again, and the beautiful landscape attracts millions of hiking and skiing tourists each year.

The **United States** has designated its 25th Ramsar site: **Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary**, which is owned and managed by Audubon of Florida. The new site (5,261 ha) lies inland of the cities of Naples and Ft Myers and provides a vital link between several south Florida watersheds. Although it is privately owned, the site's level of protection corresponds to the IUCN category IV for national parks. Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary contains pine flatwoods, wet prairies, cypress swamps, and marshes. The majestic 600-year-old bald cypress trees reach heights of 40 m and comprise the largest remaining virgin bald cypress forest in North America. The endangered Wood Stork nests high in these trees. In addition, nearly 200 species of birds – including the vulnerable (IUCN) Red-cockaded Woodpecker, the critically endangered (IUCN) Florida Bonneted Bat, and 22 species of threatened or endangered orchids live on the site.

**Argentina** has now designated the southernmost Ramsar Site, **Glaciar Vinciguerra y turberas asociadas** in the province of Tierra del Fuego includes glaciers, lakes, Sphagnum-, Cyperaceae-, and tree-dominated peatlands, *Nothofagus* (Southern beech) forests, and permanent and seasonal rivers, at an altitude between 200 and 1,300 m. Among the flora, *Skottsbergia paradoxa*, an endemic and threatened moss species, stands out. The glaciers and peatlands, excellent natural water reservoirs, play an important role in the Arroyo Grande watershed regulation, a river that is the primary water source of the city of Ushuaia. The presence of the Vinciguerra glacier and the Andorra valley's peatlands contribute to the scenic beauty of the site, which attracts local and foreign tourists. The threats to the site are horse rearing (animals feed on *Nothofagus* sprouts), tree cutting for domestic use, and, to a lesser extent, peat extraction. Additionally, climate change affects Vinciguerra glacier stability. The site acts as a buffer area between the Tierra del Fuego National Park and the suburban expansion of Ushuaia.

## WADER PUBLICATION

### Mountain Plover Conservation Plan

The tenth in an ongoing series of individual shorebird plans, a 52-page plan for Mountain Plover has recently been released.



Co-authored by Brad Andres and Kelli Stone, it summarizes what is known about the bird's ecology, status and population, habitat needs, threats, and important sites. Also identified are immediate conservation actions needed to stop or reverse the Mountain Plover's population decline over the long term. You can download the plan at: [http://www.whsrn.org/sites/default/files/MountainPlover\\_ConservationPlan\\_09-05-28a.pdf](http://www.whsrn.org/sites/default/files/MountainPlover_ConservationPlan_09-05-28a.pdf)

## COURSE ANNOUNCEMENT

### Shorebird course at Broome Bird Observatory, NW Australia: "Wave the Waders Goodbye"

Two instalments of this popular course are back again in 2010. The focus of the course will be on the diverse selection of shorebirds that visit the area every wet season although we will spend time birding in a range of habitats seeing a wide variety of birds and wildlife. This is a great opportunity to see large numbers of shorebirds at close quarters and learn all about their identification and amazing life stories. As well as time in the field there will also be illustrated presentations on shorebird identification and ecology. In the late afternoon you are invited to participate in "migration watch". This is an important part of the research work carried out by the BBO and an amazing opportunity to watch these birds actually leaving to begin their long journeys north. Subject to post-wet-season accessibility, we also tour the bush and plains to the east of the Observatory and other local birding sites where we will find a variety of bush birds and waterbirds, in addition to shorebirds that favour fresh water habitats. The price of AU\$990 includes all accommodation, tours, transfers and meals. Dates for the courses: 26–31 March and 12–17 April 2010. For more information email the warden of Broome Bird Observatory at [bbo@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:bbo@birdsaustralia.com.au)

## ONLINE RESOURCES

### New additions to SORA

SORA (Searchable Ornithological Research Archive) is a free electronic resource archive for professional bird literature that is drawn from over a dozen journals, some dating as far back as the late 19th century. The most recent addition to SORA is a valuable and venerable archive for the back issues of *North American Birds* and its predecessors (e.g. *Audubon Field Notes* and *American Birds*). Currently the *North American Birds* archives run from 1973 to 2008, however there are plans to go as far back as 1947. *North American Birds* is published by the American Birding Association and is the journal of record for birds observed within its area of coverage. SORA may be accessed at: <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/>



### Birds and environmental change booklet

Produced for the Copenhagen United Nations Climate Change Conference, a 16-page booklet presents research results of environmental change impact in South Africa: plummeting numbers of African Penguins, invasions into new areas by Africa's "feathered locust," the Red-billed Quelea, and Southern Black

Korhaans no longer seen in areas where they were plentiful twenty years ago. The illustrated booklet ([http://adu.org.za/docs/climate\\_change\\_booklet.pdf](http://adu.org.za/docs/climate_change_booklet.pdf)) was produced by the South African National Biodiversity Institute and the Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, with support from the Danish Embassy in Pretoria.

## Book Review

**NEW SHOREBIRD GUIDE: SHOREBIRDS OF THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE** BY RICHARD CHANDLER  
(2009, CHRISTOPHER HELM, LONDON, ISBN 978-1-4081-0790-4, 448 pages, £29.99)

Already there are several photographic guides to waders on the market, so do we really need another? A quick look at Richard Chandler's recently published *Shorebirds of the Northern Hemisphere* shows that the answer is "Yes, we do!" It is in a class of its own and it is very much more than just a photo-guide. It illustrates all 134 wader species found in the Northern Hemisphere and features more than 850 stunning colour photographs (an average of six per species) as well as colour distribution maps. The photographs concentrate on illustrating the progression of plumages from juvenile to adult and will therefore be a valuable aid to many ecological studies.

The species texts are detailed and authoritative; they describe key identification features, including age and sex differences, variations in plumage, similar species, status, habitat, and distribution. It is an easy-to-use guide that also includes comprehensive primers on plumage patterns and terminology, moulting, feeding and other behaviours, and much more. This premier illustrated guide is suitable for field use and is a must-have for members of the International Wader Study Group. Richard Chandler is a renowned shorebird specialist and photographer and a long-time editorial board member of *British Birds* magazine.

*Humphrey Sitters*

