

**WATERBIRD AND WETLAND CONSERVATION - IWRB'S
GLOBAL NETWORK AND THE CURRENT STATE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL RAMSAR CONVENTION AND BONN
CONVENTION**

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ABSTRACT

The paper contains an overview of IWRB's (International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau) global activities in promoting the conservation of wetlands and their biodiversity, especially waterbirds and reviews the goals and current state of wetland and waterbird conservation within the international Ramsar Convention (Convention on wetlands of international importance especially as waterfowl habitat) and Bonn Convention (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals).

Emphasis is given on how international non-governmental and governmental bodies are building a framework for the integrated conservation of wetlands around the world.

Introduction:

Wetlands occur at the interface between land and water. They serve as vital storehouses of biological diversity, and as life-support systems for many people. They are among the most productive ecosystems on Earth, ranging from estuaries and mangrove swamps - important nurseries for fish, to floodplains and swamps with their phenomenal production of vegetation, to arid zone ephemeral lakes teeming with waterbirds during intermittent floods.

For centuries, whole civilisations have depended on wetlands, the harvest of their natural products, and the benefits of their natural functions. In addition to food production and their importance for wildlife, wetlands provide water for drinking, irrigation and recreation, help to control floods, and can assist greatly with improving water quality.

Wetlands are home to numerous species of plants and animals - many of great value to people. Spectacular concentrations of waterbirds are a common feature of wetlands, providing a rich and renewable resource for recreation, education and research. In many countries they are also a prized quarry of sport hunters and an important food resource in some subsistence economies. Many waterbird species are migratory, and their conservation requires international cooperation in the fields of monitoring, research and conservation action.

Despite their obvious value, wetlands are often treated as wastelands, to be drained, built upon or polluted. In North America, the area of wetlands has more than halved this century, and even higher rates of loss have been recorded around the Mediterranean Basin and in parts of Asia. There is an urgent need to stem these rapid and irreversible losses of wetland habitats world-wide. Action is needed at all levels to protect and wisely manage the remaining wetlands, and to raise awareness of these precious resources at all levels of society.

The work of IWRB as a world-wide and independent organisation supporting conservation conventions that link concerted governmental programmes and actions demonstrates the evolution and needs of an integrated approach to wetland conservation.

International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB)

IWRB was established in 1954, and is the only global independent organisation concerned primarily with the conservation of wetland ecosystems. **IWRB promotes the conservation of wetlands and wetland biodiversity, particularly waterbirds, by stimulating and co-ordinating international technical cooperation.**

Wetland assessment and monitoring:

IWRB has played a leading role in co-ordinating inventories of wetlands throughout the world. Work is currently underway on an inventory of the wetlands of the territories of the former USSR. These projects have identified priority sites for conservation activities and are an important tool for the application of the Ramsar Convention. The MedWet project in the Mediterranean region is developing methodologies for the preparation of national wetland inventories, and programmes for monitoring ecological change in wetlands.

Monitoring waterbird populations:

IWRB's oldest project, the International Waterfowl Census covers around 100 countries around the world. Co-ordinated waterfowl surveys allow networks of important sites to be identified, population levels to be tracked and trends to be analysed in order to identify threatened species. The results are widely used for conservation planning. The vast network of

experts involved in awareness of wetland

Waterbird action

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Research groups:

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experts involved in collecting the census data, provide a powerful resource for raising awareness of wetland conservation issues.

Waterbird action plans:

Information on threatened waterbird species enable conservation action priorities to be identified. IWRB has developed action recommendations to deal with many waterbird and wetland management issues, such as the problem of lead poisoning in waterbirds.

Research groups:

More than 20 IWRB Research Groups provide an international forum for experts to communicate and collaborate. These cover taxonomic aspects, such as the Cormorant RG, Diver/Loon RG, Duck RG, Flamingo RG, Goose RG, Grebe RG, Heron RG, Pelican RG, Seaduck RG, Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills RG, Swan RG, Wader RG and Woodcock and Snipe RG, and management aspects, such as the Hunting RG, Ecological Change in Wetlands RG, Economic Assessment of Wetland Functions and Values RG, Education and Public Awareness RG, Threatened Waterfowl RG, Training for Wetland Conservation RG, Waterfowl Ecology RG, Wetland Inventory and Delineation RG, Wetland Restoration RG and Wetlands, River Basins and Water Resources Management RG.

Training:

The IWRB training programme aims to develop local institutional capacity to conserve and manage wetlands. This programme brings together specialists to attend international training courses on wetland inventory, monitoring, management and restoration. Training manuals are being developed as part of the programme.

Disseminating informations:

IWRB organises numerous scientific symposia and workshops, to stimulate international cooperation between experts in wetland and waterbird conservation. IWRB produces many publications, including a regular newsletter and a series of Special Publications.

Supporting international conventions:

IWRB played an instrumental role in the creation of the Ramsar Convention and provides technical support, both to the Ramsar Convention Bureau, and to many of the Contracting Parties to the Convention. IWRB is also working closely with the Bonn Convention, particularly through the provision of technical support to Agreements for the conservation of migratory waterbirds. IWRB maintains computerised databases containing information on all listed Ramsar sites, and the results of the International Waterfowl Census carried out worldwide.

IWRB is governed by an Executive Board comprising national delegates from over 40 member countries, together with co-ordinators of more than 20 specialist networks which group international experts in wetland and waterbird management and conservation. In addition, IWRB has "on the ground" networks of specialists actively involved in wetland conservation activities in more than 90 countries. IWRB's headquarters are located at Slimbridge, in the United Kingdom.

During the last ten years there has been a convergent evolution of IWRB, the Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB) and Wetlands for the Americas (WA). AWB now represents IWRB in the Asia/Pacific region, and IWRB and WA co-operate closely in joint programme in the Neotropical region.

Further informations can be obtained by the following addresses:

IWRB

Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BX, UK

Asian Wetland Bureau - AWB

Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Malaya,
Lembah Pantai, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

Wetlands for the Americas - WA

PO Box 1770, Manomet, MA 02345 USA

Ramsar Convention - Convention on wetlands of international importance especially as waterfowl habitat

The Convention was adopted in 1971 and is since then named after the Iranian city of Ramsar. It is the first of the modern intergovernmental agreements on conservation and wise use of natural resources. As on August 1994, **83 governments** had become members or Contracting Parties. 1982 Austria became party of the convention.

The broad objectives of the Convention are to stem the loss of wetlands and to ensure their conservation. Wetlands are truly international habitats and co-operation among States is therefore a necessity for effective wetland conservation.

The four main obligations of member states are:

- to **designate at least one wetland** in their territory for the "List of wetlands of international importance", and to **maintain the ecological character** of listed sites
- to **make "wise use" of all wetlands** in their territory; this is interpreted to mean that members should develop a national wetland policy
- to **establish wetland reserves** and **provide trained staff** for them
- to **promote international cooperation** in wetland matters, whether in the field of cross-frontier wetlands, shared species or development aid affecting wetlands.

The original text of the Convention is in many cases interpreted by **decisions, resolutions or recommendations** of the Conference of the Contracting Parties held every three years. Thus criteria for the identification of wetlands of international importance have been established. guidelines have been agreed for the implementation of the wise use concept, and the conference has established the **Wetland Conservations Fund** and two important mechanisms for maintaining ecological character of listed sites - the Montreux Record and the Monitoring Procedure. The last meeting in 1993 agreed on guidelines for management of Ramsar sites and established the Scientific and Technical Review Panel. UNESCO is the Convention Depository where member states deposit the instruments of ratification or accession.

Montreux Record

Article 3 of the Convention states that "Contracting parties shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of wetlands included in the List" and the Bureau shall be informed "**if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of**

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technological developments, pollution or other human interference". Change in ecological character does mean that the fundamentals of its ecological functioning should be conserved. The Montreux Record is established in consultation with the Contracting Party concerned and identifies priority sites for positive national and international conservation attention. The first list 1994 includes 60 sites in about 30 states.

Monitoring Procedure

The term monitoring here is meant as a mechanism for providing a Contracting Party with advice and recommendations on **how to address actual or potential problems** at a Ramsar site. Priority for application of the Monitoring Procedure is given to sites included in the Montreux Record.

The new **Scientific and Technical Review Panel** will produce guidelines for the terms "ecological character" and "change in ecological character" that are up to now very general in nature. 1993 Austria has hosted an IWRB workshop giving scientifically advice to "monitoring ecological change in wetlands".

For further information write to the Ramsar Convention Bureau, Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland.

Bonn Convention (CMS) - Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

This convention aims at the conservation and effective management of terrestrial, marine and **avian** species over the **whole** of their **migratory range**.

The Convention was concluded 1979 and came into force 3 November 1983.

As of June 1994 **41** countries from Africa, America and the Caribbean, Asia, Europe and Oceania are parties to the Convention.

The framework for the conservation of migratory species and their habitats comprises

- 1) undertaking **research activities** relating to migratory species
- 2) adopting strict **protection measures** for migratory species that have been categorised as „endangered“ (App. I to the Convention)
- 3) concluding **Agreements for the conservation of migratory species** which have an unfavourable conservation status or which would benefit significantly from international cooperation (App. II).

Agreements are open to all Range States.

The first conference was held in Bonn 1985: Call for the development of an **Agreement for Western Palearctic Anatidae**.

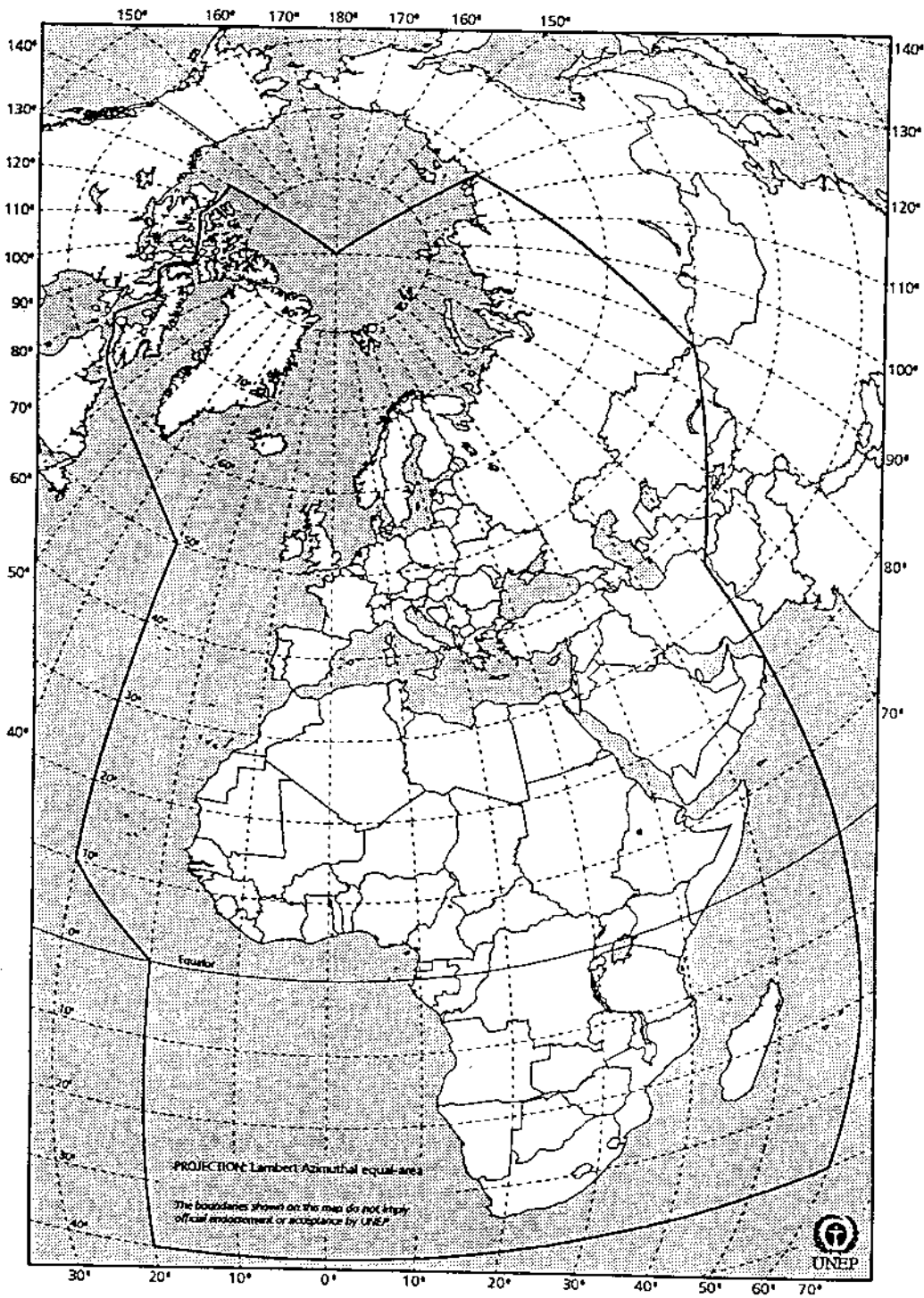
1988-1991: Draft Agreement, including **Action Plan for Anatidae and Management Plan**.

Final draft: **Western Palearctic Waterfowl Agreement** - suspended by the EEC Commission because of lack of resources (1991)

1992: **White Stork Agreement** is included and the **Western Palearctic Waterfowl Agreement** is updated and harmonised with the draft of an **Agreement on the Conservation of Migratory Waterbirds in the Asia-Pacific Region**

1993: New Draft from IWRB: **Management Plan and Action Plan for Anatidae and Action Plan for migratory Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills**

Annex 1a: Map of the Agreement Area



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1994: Revised (with help from IWRB and IUCN) **Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)** two Action Plans and Management Plan submitted for comments to the Conference of the Parties. Further work on the near final draft. Signing of the final act is expected 1995.

Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds

Coverage: 212 species, subdivided into 417 populations, area of 60 million square kilometres, encompassing 115 Range States in Africa, Europe, Asia.

Annex 1: **Map** of the Agreement Area

Annex 2: **Waterbird families** covered by the agreement

Annex 3: **Action plan Anatidae**: Species of Anatidae included in the Action Plan, range states included in the action plan, endangered species and populations of Anatidae in the agreement area, other species and populations of Anatidae with an unfavourable conservation status in the agreement area

Annex 4: **Action plan Ciconiidae and Threskiornithidae**: Species of Ciconiidae and Threskiornithidae included in the action plan, range states included in the action plan, endangered species and populations of Ciconiidae and Threskiornithidae in the agreement area, other species and populations of Ciconiidae and Threskiornithidae with an unfavourable conservation status in the agreement area.

Progress is being made, albeit slowly, towards the more effective application of the Bonn Convention. The situation is not helped by the Convention's two-tier system, by which Agreements must be separately negotiated, signed and ratified by the Contracting Parties concerned. On the other hand, this system is highly flexible in keeping with the enormous range of situations and migratory species covered by the Convention. The Convention does at least provide a framework and incentives for the conclusion of such Agreements, which would almost certainly not be negotiated if the Convention did not exist.

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