

The International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) is an international network of specialists having a particular interest in mire and peatland conservation. The network encompasses a wide spectrum of expertise and interests, from research scientists to consultants, government agency specialists to peatland site managers. It operates largely through e-mail and newsletters, and holds regular workshops and symposia. For more information: consult the IMCG Website: <http://www.imcg.net>

IMCG has a Main Board of 15 people from various parts of the world that has to take decisions between congresses. Of these 15 an elected 5 constitute the IMCG Executive Committee that handles day-to-day affairs. The Executive Committee consists of a Chairman (Jennie Whinam), a Secretary General (Hans Joosten), a Treasurer (Philippe Julve), and 2 additional members (Tatiana Minaeva, Piet-Louis Grundling).

Viktor Masing (†), Hugo Sjörs, and Richard Lindsay have been awarded honorary membership of IMCG.

## Editorial

Several important events are laying ahead of us, first of all the Ramsar Conference of Parties (CoP9, 8-15 November, Kampala, Uganda), where IMCG will be actively present. In this Newsletter you may find an overview of the peatland issues in the conference documents and information on some of the activities that IMCG organises, including a fascinating excursion to Uganda mires and a side event together with CoCoGAP. Furthermore, we are working on promotion material: a peatland brochure (with CoCoGAP), a flyer on African peatlands, and a new general IMCG flyer. Michael Trepel has already produced a beautiful set of postcards to bring the major global peatland issues under wide attention.

Directly after the Ramsar CoP9, our Tierra del Fuego Field Symposium (21 November – 1 December) will be held in Ushuaia and surroundings. Both the organisers in Argentina and the participants from all over the world are preparing this event that will be a major stimulant for mire conservation and research in this part of the world.

From 28 November to 9 December 2005 Canada will host the first meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol in Montréal in conjunction with the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention. Also there we will try to raise the attention for peatlands and the role they play in global climate regulation. And then it will already be 2006!

Don't forget to register in time for the IMCG Field Symposium and General Assembly in Finland 2006, because places are limited and interests large. Information can be found on the IMCG homepage.

Then, there is a reason for some celebration as this is the 25<sup>th</sup> IMCG Newsletter produced by the Greifswald Secretariat. We are proud so many people have helped us to produce so many pages. We hope you agree it has been worthwhile. As always this newsletter contains a variety of peatland news from all over the world, a presentation of recent new literature, and an overview of relevant future congresses and conferences.

Please send all your proposals, discussion contributions, news, publications, etc. to us, and with your help we will again prepare an interesting Newsletter. Deadline for the next Newsletter is 14 December 2005.

For information or other things, contact us at the IMCG Secretariat. Address updates should be sent to Jan Sliva: [sliva@wzw.tum.de](mailto:sliva@wzw.tum.de). In the meantime, keep an eye on the continuously refreshed and refreshing IMCG web-site: <http://www.imcg.net>

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### A note from the Chair

Our membership recruitment and IMCG activities continue to expand, notably with the new IMCG/IPS scientific journal that will soon be launched. However, the threats to peatlands internationally also intensify. For example, the Via Baltica expressway connecting Helsinki with Warsaw is being promoted by the Polish government, even though it would severely impact on Ramsar and Natura 2000 sites; the proposed wind turbine development on the Isle of Lewis (Scotland) threatens the integrity of several peatland habitats. IMCG members are helping to promote the values of peatlands locally, nationally and internationally.

The next major international peatland event is the Ramsar convention meeting in Uganda in November. Several IMCG board members will attend this important meeting – both in their IMCG capacity or representing member states. We will be hoping that some positive resolutions arise for the conservation and wise use of peatlands. The members of the

Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (CoCo GAP) are working vigorously to raise the attention to peatlands, e.g. by organising a pre-conference peatland excursion, a peatland side-event, and all kinds of promotion material.

Also in November is the IMCG Field Symposium in Tierra del Fuego, being organised by Rodolfo and Adriana and their colleagues. This will be a great chance to see expansive mires in the southern temperate zone – and quite a contrast to the recent IMCG symposium in South Africa. Unfortunately this field symposium was so popular that many people missed out due to logistic restrictions. However, if you want to come along and be involved in an IMCG field symposium then join our membership and don't miss out on the exciting trip proposed by our Finnish colleagues for July 2006.

Jennie Whinam

**Ramsar CoP 9 (Kampala Uganda November 2005) will be a major opportunity to influence international policies with respect to mire and peatland conservation and wise use. IMCG members who will be present at the CoP as representatives of their countries are urgently requested to contact Tatiana Minaeva for discussing the resolutions and for coordinating interventions: [tminaeva@wwf.ru](mailto:tminaeva@wwf.ru)**

### Ramsar CoP 9: Where are the peatlands?

The Conference of Parties of the Ramsar Convention is approaching rapidly. In the last IMCG Newsletter 2005/2 we expressed our concern that Ramsar seems to fall back in the “Cinderella Syndrome”, that the importance of peatlands is not recognized, or even worse, that peatlands are not visible at all. How is the situation at present? Most draft documents and draft resolutions have meanwhile appeared on the internet. Here we give an overview of where mires and peatlands appear in the most important texts. Peatland information is also (sometimes...) available in the country reports that every contracting party has to submit on the state of the art of wetland conservation and wise use in its country and the activities supporting these. Check what your country has reported about mires and peatlands under: [www.ramsar.org/index\\_cop9\\_e.htm](http://www.ramsar.org/index_cop9_e.htm)

#### *Ramsar CoP 9 Documents*

**The Report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the Convention at the global level reports:**

“27. Only 20% of Parties are promoting the wise use of wetlands for water supply, coastal protection, etc., while 17% are promoting conservation and wise use of peatlands as an example of the ecosystem approach, and 14% are involved in the dissemination of methodologies to achieve the conservation and wise use of peatlands. However, 90% are planning to promote the significance of wetlands for water supply, coastal protection and flood defence – particularly relevant given recent events such as the tsunami in the Indian Ocean and recent hurricanes. 77% are attempting better dissemination of materials to promote wetland wise use.

29. In response to Resolution VIII.17 the Secretariat has established a Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands, which, as requested, has developed an Implementation Plan for the Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands (GGAP) adopted at COP8. The Committee is a multisectoral consortium involving representatives of NGOs, the private sector, academic and research institutes and inter-governmental conventions and agreements, and this has led to enhanced common understanding and agreement on implementation issues and priorities. The Committee is preparing a progress report on implementation of the COP8 guidelines which, together with the GGAP Implementation Plan, will be prepared as a Ramsar Technical Report so as to make it as widely available to Parties and other interested organizations as possible.” (in: GOAL 1. The wise use of wetlands, STRATEGY 1.3: Increase recognition of the significance of wetlands for reasons of water supply, coastal protection, flood defence, food security, poverty alleviation, cultural heritage, and scientific research).

In the **Regional overview of the implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan 2003 - 2008: Neotropics** we can read:

“2.3.B Peatlands [3.2]

30. Only Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica report having taken measures to apply the COP8 Ramsar guidelines for peatland ecosystems at the national level. However, a number of Parties have designated Ramsar sites containing peatlands as an under-represented wetland type, including Argentina (Reserva Provincial Laguna Brava, in 2003 and 2 sites before COP8); Bolivia (3 sites, all prior to COP8); Colombia (1 site prior to COP8); Costa Rica (Turberas de Talamanca, designated in 2003 and 1 site prior to COP8); Cuba (Ciénaga de Lanier y Sur de la Isla de la Juventud, and Humedal Delta del Cauto, during COP8, and one prior to COP8); Honduras Lago de Yojoa, in 2005) and Peru (3 sites of which Bofedales y Laguna de Salinas, and Laguna del Indio - Dique Los Españoles were designated in the last triennium). Other countries that have Ramsar sites that contain peatlands which were designated prior to COP8 include Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay. The other countries have recognized the importance of the under-represented wetland types and will consider them for future designations once the inventorying efforts currently underway or in the planning stages are finalized. See additional reference to under-represented wetland types on Table 1, where the presence of under-represented wetland types in new site designations is detailed.

31. Given the non-homogeneous geographical distribution of “bofedales” and peatlands in the Neotropics, it is not surprising to see a variety of priorities assigned to them. Since this is not a common ecosystem to all countries, its range of priority is noticeably lower than for other shared Objectives, and only Peru has assigned a high

importance and abundant economic resources to them. In the other cases, the countries that have shown the greatest progress (Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica) have assigned middle importance to peatlands, while 3 other countries in the region have considered them non-relevant. In general, there is overlap among the countries that have deployed the greatest efforts in this area and those who are part of the High Andean Wetlands Strategy. ...

63. During the last triennium 48%, 12 of the 25 countries of the region (Antigua and Barbuda (1), Argentina (3), Colombia (1), Costa Rica (1), Cuba (5), Ecuador (2), Honduras (2), Jamaica (1), Panama (1), Paraguay (1), Peru (2), and Uruguay (1)), have given special attention to the designation of 21 Ramsar sites with under-represented wetland types, many of which are the dominant type in the wetland: coral reefs, temporary pools, mangrove swamps, wet grasslands, karst systems and peatlands. Jamaica fulfilled its commitment to designate one additional site with under-represented wetland types (Palisadoes-Port Royal) in the last triennium. Recognition of under-represented wetland types has improved steadily in the Neotropics region. See Table 1 in the Annex for details on the new Ramsar sites.”

In the **Regional overview of the implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan 2003 - 2008: North America** we read:

“13. The Wildlife Habitat Canada Organization is working with Wetlands International-Indonesia, with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency, CIDA (US\$3.4 million/5 years), the government of Indonesia, and the Global Environmental Centre, to promote conservation practices for peatlands in Indonesia. ...

2.3.B Peatlands [3.2]

41. Canada has participated in the process guided by the Ramsar Secretariat for establishing a Coordinating Committee for global action on peatlands.

42. Canada and the United States reported giving special attention to under-represented wetland types, including peatlands. Furthermore, Canada also highlighted the presence of peatlands in its Ramsar sites and mentioned that Wildlife Habitat Canada has been the leader in developing a peatland website (www.peat-portal.net). Likewise, Canada reported CIDA is supporting a project on peatlands in Indonesia through Wetlands International (WI) – Indonesia Program. In addition they mentioned there are peatland inventories that currently exist in several Canadian provinces. Mexico reported lack of knowledge about the peatland situation and indicated this should be a point of analysis for the national wetlands inventory. None of the three countries applies the COP8 Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands. ...”

Under “15.A Promoting international assistance to support the conservation and wise use of wetlands [15.1]” 92. Canada and the United States have

development assistance bodies and both have provided funding to conserve and manage wetlands in other countries. Two examples from Canada are: capacity building in Iraq (marshes) and Indonesia (peatlands)."

The document **The Nordic-Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet)**, a regional initiative of Denmark/Greenland, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, and Sweden, aiming to promote the objectives of the Convention, contains a proposal of Norway:

"6. The operation of a regional initiative should be based upon strong scientific and technical backing, provided by relevant institutions which should be recognized as partners in the initiative. Reference is made to "Priority areas and possible means and approaches – initial steps" – page 3 in the summary from the WG-Meeting. Relevant scientific institutions etc will be involved – e.g. the International Mire Conservation Group."

The **Regional Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of High Andean Wetlands** writes:

"3. General Characteristics of High Andean wetlands The Patagonian riparian habitats (mallines or wet prairies) form a well defined landscape unit based on its geomorphology and vegetation, but they are fundamentally related to the hydrologic mechanism that is analogous in all of them. Mallines are found in the high mountain range as well as the Patagonian extra-Andean plateau. In many cases mallines may lead to the formation of peat bogs. ...

### 3.2 Types and origins of High Andean wetland

The High Andean wetlands are located mainly at the páramo, jalca and puna ecosystems, besides other High Andean ecosystems. They form systems with a great variety of environments that may include, according to their type and origin: freshwater lakes and lagoons (glacier, volcanic and tectonic), salt pans (old seas evaporating), saline lagoons (old seas with low fresh water supply), brackish lagoons (old seas with more freshwater diluted), bofedales and peat logs (flooding or underground sources), thermal waters and geysers (volcanic activity close to water sources), mallines or wet prairies (with surface or underground supply that gives them the category of oasis in arid zones). Likewise, according to the kind of vegetation, it is possible to find several formations including totorales (dense flooded or semi-flooded sedge formations, close to lakes and lagoons), vegas (dense or very dense herb formations, integrated by temporary surface draining associated with saline streams or soils), chuscales (dense formations of Chusquea associated with humid soils), and many others. ...

### 3.5 Economic Importance

Productive activities at the High Andean wetlands are related to the altitude level in which they are located. In the puna, jaca and páramo zones the predominant activities are mining, raising cattle, sheep and camelidae, fishing and forest industry. It is also

important to mention that extraction of plants and peat log for use as fuel is a livelihood, because a great number of rural people in many areas depend on firewood to cook.

### 3.6 Cultural Importance

Different Andean cultures have managed these ecosystems in a sustainable manner and have created, for example, artificial peatlands to stimulate the presence of vicuna and to breed alpaca and llamas; they have also made freshwater reservoirs, irrigation channels and sukakollos, which in spite of being built several centuries ago are still functioning in some regions. Nevertheless, water management and the hydro technology of these cultures has gradually disappeared since the time of colonization, but it has been well documented by anthropologists specialized in Andean ecology. ...

Table 2. High Mountain Ecosystems at Los Andes, Costa Rica and Panama: Condition, Trends and Pressures: ...Trend for greater fragility and degradation of peat lands and swamps, compared to lakes and lagoons.

### Condition:

In general, High Andean wetlands have low diversity and an extremely high level of endemism and specialization, as well as high environmental heterogeneity. However, the High Andean wetlands, including lakes, lagoons, salt pans, formations of vegas and peat lands, constitute concentration centres of fauna and flora within the extreme aridity that characterizes the puna. The wet steppes of vegas and peat lands constitute the vegetal associations with the greatest relative diversity of species of flora and the highest primary productivity. They are the feeding base for many wild species and domestic camelidae. ...

### 4.5 Perspectives

It is important to highlight the fundamental role of understanding the hydrological functioning of wetlands, since the existence and availability of water controls all other aspects of the ecosystem: primary production, usage, habitat, and degradation risk. It is thus recommended to sponsor research projects on this topic, and exchange of best practices in different types of wetlands such as mallines and peat lands, which seem to function under the same hydrological principles.

### Costa Rica

The mountain wetlands are located in the Talamanca Range, distributed between Parque Nacional Chirripó, Cerro de la Muerte, Reserva Forestal Los Santos and Parque Nacional Tapantí - Macizo de la Muerte. It is quite a heterogeneous zone in terms of weather and ecosystems, which has resulted in development of a great number of vegetal associations, such as peatlands and páramos, typical of the Andean environments. In general, altitudes range from 700 to 3,491 mosl. However, peatlands are from 2,600 to 3,290 mosl (Chaverri, under prep.) ...

The Ramsar site Turberas de Talamanca covers an extension of 192,520 hectares, and there are altitudes that usually range from 700 to 3,491 mosl. However, peatlands are found between 2,600 and 3,290 mosl (Chaverri, under prep.).”

#### *Ramsar CoP 9 Draft Resolutions*

##### **Draft Resolution 2: Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention:**

“26. Promote and secure the wise use of peatland ecosystems and their services, as a demonstration of the application of the Convention’s wise use concept, including through the work of the Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (GGAP) as a multi-sectoral mechanism and the delivery of the Implementation Plan and priorities it has developed under Resolution VIII.17 for Global Action on Peatlands (to be made available as a Ramsar Technical Report), emphasizing the dissemination of information, monitoring implementation of GGAP by Parties and others, identification of gaps, and assistance in fundraising for further GGAP implementation. [GGAP Coordinating Committee; CPs; Secretariat] (STRP12)

27. Develop and implement a survival plan for tropical peat swamp forests. [CPs, GGAP Coordinating Committee, donors] (STRP12)” ...

Concerning environmental water requirements

[81. Those responsible for drawing up and implementing plans for abstraction of water from river basins or discharge of water or waste into river basins: take into account the water requirements of all types of wetlands (including peatlands and other inland and coastal wetlands), including both requirements to be met from surface runoff and those to be met from groundwater.] [CPs] [DR1 Annex C]”

##### **Draft Resolution 9: A Framework for the implementation of the Convention’s Strategic Plan 2003-2008 in the 2006-2008 period. Annex:**

“Preamble ...

2. Good water governance and capacity building at a local level are keys to sustainable development. As the Millennium Development Goals state, water supplies of good quality and maintenance of wetland ecosystem services are essential for all, but also fundamental to poverty reduction. Water supplies are dependent upon the protection and sustainable use of wetland and related ecosystems that naturally capture, filter, store and release water, inter alia swamps, mires, fens, lakes and riverine systems. Component biodiversity of such systems plays a key role in ensuring continued delivery of these water-related functions. Changing component biodiversity may increase poverty, increase risks to human health, and undermine livelihood security (including food and water security). ...

STRATEGY 1.3 (Operational objective 3.1 -3.3 ) Increase recognition of the significance of wetlands for reasons of water supply, coastal protection, flood defense, climate change mitigation, food security,

poverty reduction, cultural heritage, and scientific research, with a focus on under-represented ecosystem types, through developing and disseminating methodology to achieve wise use of wetlands. (CPs, Secretariat, IOPs) ...

KRAs (Key Results Areas): By COP10: § Development and implementation of wise use wetland programmes and projects that contribute to poverty reduction objectives and food and water security plans at local and national levels in place. § Full implementation of the Guidelines for global action on peatlands (VIII.17) through the activities of the Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands.”

##### **Draft resolution 12: Revised modus operandi of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP):**

“17. REVISES as follows the list of bodies and organizations invited to participate as observers in the meetings of the STRP during the 2006-2008 triennium, and INVITES these bodies and organizations to consider establishing close working cooperative arrangements with the STRP on matters of common interest: ...

- the Society of Wetland Scientists
- the International Mire Conservation Group
- the International Peat Society
- ....”

##### **CoCoGAP:**

For comparison the (raw) text that the Ramsar Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (CoCoGAP) in which IMCG participates, had proposed for inclusion in the Ramsar Resolutions:

“The Conference of the Contracting Parties

1. RECOGNIZES that, in accordance with Resolution VIII-17, a Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (CC-GAP) was established in 2003, providing an intersectoral partnership between Government organisations, NGOs, and the scientific and private sectors. This proved to be very effective, building on the achievements of the Global Peatland Initiative and supported by the Ramsar Secretariat, in bringing together the major stakeholders, resulting in:

- monitoring progress on the implementation of the Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands
- identification of priorities and recommendations for further actions
- the development of an implementation plan for Global Action on Peatlands.

REQUESTS that the CC-GAP continue to undertake the role of representing peatland stakeholders, and act as a coordinating body for global action on peatlands. FURTHER REQUESTS that the Ramsar Secretariat continue to support the work of the CC-GAP.

2. RECOMMENDS that, consistent with the Guidelines, the CPs pay increased attention to the importance of peatlands in national and international policies and strategies and provide the necessary resources. That the CPs ensure that peatland

functions and values are recognised in relation to e.g. the Millennium Development Goals, Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Clean Development Mechanism of the UNFCCC, and are reflected in National Biodiversity Strategies, National Wetland Action Plans and Integrated Water Resources Management plans.

3. URGES the CPs to endorse the global guidelines for peatland wise use and management published in 2002 and developed by a consortium of peatland organisations, and to support their implementation through public-private partnerships.

4. URGES CPs and the international donor community to develop and implement a survival plan for tropical peat swamp forests and to support efforts to establish a multi-donor trust fund, considering the

alarming rate of destruction of tropical peat swamp forests and the associated problems of carbon emissions, poverty and loss of biodiversity.

5. REQUESTS that CPs integrate peatlands in river basin planning and Integrated Water Resources Management, considering the important hydrological role of upland and mountain peatlands for downstream areas, as well as the reliance of all peatlands on sound hydrological management.

6. URGES the CPs to acknowledge the inter-relationship between climate change, desertification and peatland degradation, with particular reference to tropical and permafrost peatlands. FURTHERMORE URGES CPs to incorporate peatland wise use into their climate change and desertification policies, and the work of the UNFCCC/CDM and the UNCCD."

### **Ramsar CoP 9 Side Event Global Action on Peatlands – the past, present and future**

During the Ramsar CoP9 in Kampala, Uganda, a side event will be devoted to peatlands. The probable date will be Friday 11 November 2005 (2nd option Saturday 12 November 2005). Time: 1:15 – 2:45 pm

The goal: Presentation of the current status of the Implementation of the Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands (GGAP), significant achievements and most important challenges in the upcoming triennium.

#### *Responsible Organisers:*

The Secretariat of the Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (CoCo GAP) with its partners: Wetlands International (International Mire Conservation Group, International Peat Society, Alterra, Global Environment Centre.

#### *Thematic focus:*

The side event is linked with the work of the Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (CoCo-GAP), successfully initiated after COP8 in view of implementing Resolution VIII.17. The setting-up of such inter-sectoral committee, which includes also the private sector, was seen by Ramsar as an innovative and efficient approach.

"Full implementation of the guidelines for global action on peatlands" is a key result area under the Strategy 1.3 of the proposed Ramsar Strategic Framework for the implementation of the Convention 2006-2008 (draft resolution 9, see above). Peatland issues are also addressed in Annex 2 of the draft resolution 2 on the further priority scientific and technical aspects to be addressed by the Convention.

During the side-event, parts of the Implementation Plan of GGAP will be presented, including their status of fulfilment, achieved goals, implementation difficulties and obstacles. Also the plan for the next future will be explained and demonstrated (e.g. Knowledge of global resources; Wise use of peatlands; Research networks; International and intersectoral cooperations). The side event will be used also to launch and distribute a new brochure of CoCo GAP containing important actual peatland-related facts and information.

#### *Preliminary program:*

(13:00) End of the official main CoP morning agenda  
13:05 – 13:20 Cultural entertainment in front of the Side-event hall (drums and dance), catering  
13:25 – 13:35 Side event opening: aims and goals  
13:35 – 13:55 GGAP and its Implementation Plan: a cross-section of history, past and future: what is GGAP and what is CoCo-GAP, introduction of the Implementation Plan; what was reached till now and with which problems and solutions are we faced in the next future.  
13:55 – 14:10 Guidelines for Wise use of tropical peatlands (focus on SE Asia)  
14:10 – 14:25 Implementation of GGAP in Africa – Challenge for the next decade  
14:25 – 14:40 What after CoP9? – visions, work and milestones in the GGAP after Kampala  
14:40 – 14:45 Closing Side event; launching the brochure

## IMCG Excursion Mires and Peatlands of Uganda

5 – 7 November 2005

A three-day excursion, prior to the RAMSAR CoP 9 in Kampala, Nov 2005, presents a unique opportunity to explore the diversity and functions of the mires and peatlands of Uganda, their current utilization and threats.

The IMCG Excursion “Ugandan mires and peatlands” is prepared in cooperation with the Uganda Wetlands Inspection Division (Ministry of Lands, Water and Environment) primarily for those IMCG, IPS and CoCo-GAP (Coordinating Committee of GGAP) members, who will attend the 9th Ramsar Conference of Parties in Kampala, Uganda in November this year. Two excursions are offered: a one-day excursion on Saturday 5 November and a two-days excursion on Sunday and Monday 6 and 7 November.

Due to logistical constraints, the number of participants is limited to fifteen only. Thus, all those who are interested to participate in these fieldtrips, are kindly requested to contact the organiser as soon as possible. Registration will be on a first come, first serve basis until all available places will be filled.

### Excursion programme

5 November 2005: Lake Kyoga and Lubenge floodplains, with following excursion points:

(1) Lake Kyoga, a large lake with extended papyrus swamps. The group will visit the small fishery village of Kibuye, and use the fishers' boats to investigate papyrus floating mats (*Cyperus papyrus*) and papyrus peatlands on the lake margins and free floating papyrus islands on the lake. Peat production by papyrus communities will be discussed. Return to Kibuye for a discussion with fishers and Ms. Monicah Zalwango (assistant fisheries officer) about the traditional utilisation of wetlands resources. Additional point of interest: Traditional architecture and life-style of the Kibuye villagers.

(2) Seasonal and permanent swamps between Lwamapanga. Lwanama - Nabiswera on the southern shores of the Lake Kyoga

(3) Floodplain system of Lubenge river between Nakasongola and Luwero. as an example of a floodplain ecosystem. Typical floodplain morphology and vegetation with grassreed-sedge dominated plains, water pools and small woodland islands on termitaria mounds. Topic for discussion includes: The floodplain's water regime, carbon sequestration and utilisation of floodplains.

6 November 2005: Mountain peatlands in Kigezi region. The first day of the 2-day excursion deals with mountain peatlands in the Kigezi region in the southwestern corner of Uganda, close to Congo and Rwanda. The volcanic area of the Kigezi and Virunga mountains is characterised by steep hills between 2000 and 4000 m a.s.l. (Muhavura volcano 4127 m) and deep v-shaped valleys supporting water accumulation (e.g. lake Bunyonyi) and often peatland

formation. The densely populated region with mild mountain climate is severely impacted by extensive deforestation and erosion. The peatlands are increasingly converted into agricultural fields and gardens. The remnants of the mountain forests provide habitat to the last populations of mountain gorillas (Mgahira Gorilla N.P.)

### Excursion points:

(1) Echuya mire (ca. 2100 m a.s.l.) is until now the only known mountain valley peatland with characteristic *Carex*-dominated vegetation in Uganda. The mire is still in pristine condition, the efforts in the past to convert the mire to pastures fortunately failed due to difficult drainage. The central part of the peatland could provide habitat for a small population of *Lobelia*, usually occurring only in the high-elevated moor- and heathland zones of Ruwenzori and Mt. Elgon. On the way to and from the Echuya mire, both remnants of pristine mountain broad-leaved forests and bamboo forests, as well as extensive deforested slopes, used for agriculture, can be observed. A short stop on the shores of Lake Bunyonyi will allow to experience its scenic beauty.

(2) Ruhuma peatland (ca. 1900 m asl, close to Nyarurambi, on Kabirizi-Kisoro road). The extended valley peatland with papyrus and *Miscanthus* dominated vegetation was in pristine stage still two years ago. Due to the enormous needs of the local population, almost the whole peatland was converted, in a short space of time, into agricultural lands. Currently, the construction of a road across the valley additionally affects the peatland hydrology.

(3) Kiruruma peatland (ca. 1800 m a.s.l.), an extensive valley peatland (ca. 18 x 0.5 km), northwest of Kabale, along the Kabale-Kisoro road. These peat deposits have been assessed to be up to 16 m in thickness. Formerly, the peatland was covered by *Syzygium* woodland. Today, only small patches remain while the major area was converted either to pastures or gardens. It is also habitat for cranes.

In the Uganda Alternative Energy Resources Assessment and Utilisation Study. (2004), Finnish consultants (Elektro-Watt – Ekono-Oy – Norplan AS) recommended the use of this peatland for intensive peat production for an electro-power plant project. The Ugandan Ministry of Energy handed over all reports to the IMCG with the request for an independent assessment of the environmental impact of this proposal. During the excursion, both transformed and pristine sites will be visited and possible social and environmental impacts of the proposed project preliminary will be discussed.

7th November 2005: Sango Bay (Lake Victoria). Lowland swamps and swamp forests

The second day of the 2-day fieldtrip focuses on tropical lowland wetlands and peatlands close to Lake Victoria at the Uganda-Tanzania boarder.

Sango Bay is a vast and almost pristine mosaic of wetland and peatland types including different swamp forest formations, papyrus swamps, *Miscanthus* swamp and seasonally flooded floodplains with grasslands. Arriving in the area, the introduction will be given on a scenic hill with breathtaking views over Sango Bay and Kagera river valley. After that several wetland and peatland types can be visited (programme can be modified accordingly to the accessibility of sites).

Excursion points:

- (1) Kagera river swamps and peatlands
- (2) Tropical swamp forests north of Kyebe
- (3) *Podocarpus* and *Phoenix reclinata* swamp forests

IMCG and IPS members and members of CoCo GAP are kindly asked to register as soon as possible. For registration, please send email to Jan Sliva: [sliva@wzw.tum.de](mailto:sliva@wzw.tum.de).

Jan Sliva

For more information (and pictures of the sites) surf to the calendar section of the IMCG homepage

### The European Mires Book

In the last week of September 2005, beginning of October Asbjörn Moen and Hans Joosten are sitting together to continue the work on finalizing the European Mires Book. This major IMCG project, in which many IMCG members from almost all European countries participate, is "on the road" for already many years, but – as is often with such giant projects – has problems with its completion. Main Board member Asbjörn Moen has now joined the Greifswald editing team to bring the enterprise to an end. In the near future we will review all submitted

country contributions critically and come back to the authors with proposals and questions. A real challenge is the merger of all national data in European overviews, compilations, and integrations. This is what we are currently trying to do, also to get a good point of departure for streamlining the national contributions.

The work is running again; so don't be surprised when you are contacted one of these days...

### UNESCO / Keizo Obuchi Fellowships

UNESCO invites young postgraduate researchers in developing countries with a master's degree (or equivalent) to apply for fellowships, each worth US\$6,000 to US\$10,000, through the UNESCO / Keizo Obuchi Research Fellowship Programme.

The programme – named after the late Japanese prime minister Keizo Obuchi who was known for his commitment to development issues – offers a total of 20 fellowships to researchers active in one of four fields: the environment, inter-cultural dialogue, information and communication technology, and peaceful conflict resolution. This is the sixth year

running that Japan has awarded these grants. Applications must reach UNESCO Headquarters in Paris before 13 January 2006.

Researchers under 40 years of age may submit their applications to their country's National Commission for UNESCO, which will select a maximum of two candidates. A special selection committee of experts in the four research fields concerned will review the applications in order to make proposals to the director-general.

For more information: Ali Zaid: [a.zaid@unesco.org](mailto:a.zaid@unesco.org)





## Katrina and Louisiana peatlands

The Katrina disaster was not just a natural disaster. New Orleans is the inevitable city on an impossible site. North America's interior is drained by a single river system, the Mississippi. With its vast network of tributaries, particularly the Ohio and Missouri Rivers, the Mississippi provides a natural waterway system for moving people and goods across the midcontinent of North America and down to its outlet on the Gulf. A city strategically situated at the mouth of this river system could control the trade between the vast interior of North America and the rest of the world.

The French had established themselves in the northern part of North America (Canada) in the mid-seventeenth century and they sought to control the interior of North America by securing the Mississippi and its outlet to the Gulf. The French explorers discovered there was a problem. From the mouth of the Mississippi to a point about 200 miles upstream (Baton Rouge), there was no ground high enough to provide a natural site for a city. While the great river demanded a port, it seemed to provide no place for one. In the end, the French did find a site for a city, but there were numerous problems associated with it. The Mississippi delta is a region prone to excessive heat, annual floods, heavy rain, hurricanes, mosquitoes and disease. The delta environment has forced New Orleans into strange shapes and patterns of growth.

Although the coastal area near the Mississippi delta sinks at a rate of close to a millimetre per year, the rate of sedimentation has been such that the river extends its delta into the Gulf and fills its embayment, even as it sinks, with silt, clay, sand, and peat. Besides not providing solid bedrock to build upon, the sedimentation also caused waterways to clog up and a deep water channel had to be dug. The rate of sedimentation decreased under the stronger currents and occasional high river water levels would lead to flooding of large areas. Artificial levees were built to overcome this problem.

Periodic flooding over the natural river levees had already led to the formation of extensive peatland areas, the so-called back swamps, dominated by cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). During the 1700s, cypress was the principal cash product for most colonists of the lower Mississippi Valley. Large-scale commercial logging of cypress began when the Homestead Act of 1866, that declared swamp lands unfit for cultivation and unavailable to private individuals, was repealed by the Timber Act of 1876. By the close of the 19th century over 7 million m<sup>3</sup> of bald cypress had been logged in Louisiana.

By building artificial levees and draining the peatlands, more and more backswamp areas have been made available for urban development. Since the 1950s engineers have also cut more than 13,000

kilometres of canals through the peatlands for petroleum exploration and ship traffic. Currently, the Louisiana coast supports more than a third of the nation's oil and a quarter of its natural gas production and ranks second only to Alaska in commercial fish landings. These new ditches sliced the wetlands into a giant jigsaw puzzle, increasing erosion and allowing salt water to infiltrate brackish and freshwater areas, destroying the ecological balance that allowed for peat to accumulate. Of course drainage furthermore meant subsidence and as much of modern, especially suburban New Orleans is built on peat and muck, it now lies several metres below sea level.

In the end, there was a large, economically flourishing city, on instable grounds largely located below sea level, in an area frequented by hurricanes and floods. The disaster was almost inevitable.

Of course the Mississippi delta is not the only place in the world where humans have settled and destroyed the protective coastal wetlands. Deforestation and drainage of coastal wetlands has been widely practised all over the world. Major cities like London, New York and Hamburg are all located near large river mouths and have expanded at the cost of the natural flooding regimes of these rivers. Amsterdam and St. Petersburg are built on peat and subject to subsidence, sinking deeper and deeper under sea level. In Europe human expansion has resulted in the loss of virtually all coastal floodplain forests. In South East Asia, the loss of coastal mangroves was deeply felt when the tsunami hit in late 2004. The mangroves have clearly shown to provide a protective belt even against such rare extreme phenomena as giant tsunami waves. Thirty-two percent of the formerly forested peatland area of peninsular Malaysia is currently utilised for agriculture (oil palm, rubber, coconut) and mixed horticulture. In the United States forested wetlands like the cypress swamps have been lost at rates five times higher than non-wetland forests. In the Carolinas, the introduction of steam dredging and logging railroad technology in the 1850s led to the harvest of virtually every known stand of Atlantic white-cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*).

As for the Mississippi delta, actions to counter the degradation – such as rebuilding marshes with dredge spoil and salt-tolerant plants or trying to stabilize a shoreline that's eroding 10 metres a year – have had limited success. The most promising and radical solution is to let the river run its course again, allowing for sedimentation and regular flooding of the flats.

## Wetlands and Water: Ecosystems and Human Well-being

The Millennium Assessment (MA) wetlands and water synthesis report is anticipated to be printed in October, to be launched at Ramsar COP9.

At its February 2005 meeting, the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel STRP reviewed the draft MA synthesis report for the Ramsar Convention ("Wetlands and Water: Ecosystems and Human Well-being"), and recommended that a short set of Key Messages should be prepared to go at the front of the report, given that not all decision-makers would be likely to read the longer Summary for Decision Makers. These Key Messages are:

- A cross-sectoral focus is urgently needed from policy- and decision-makers that emphasizes securing wetland ecosystem services in the context of achieving sustainable development and improving human well-being.
  - Management of wetlands and water resources is most successfully addressed through integrated management at the river (or lake or aquifer) basin scale that is linked to coastal zone management for coastal and near-shore wetlands.
  - Wetlands deliver a wide range of critical and important services (e.g. fish and fiber, water supply, water purification, coastal protection, recreational opportunities, and increasingly, tourism) vital for human well-being. Maintaining the natural functioning of wetlands will enable them to continue to deliver these services.
  - The principal supply of renewable fresh water for humans comes from an array of wetland types, including lakes, rivers, swamps and groundwater aquifers. Some 1.5 to 3 billion people are dependent on groundwater as a source of drinking water.
  - The services delivered by wetlands have been arguably valued at US\$14 trillion annually. Economic valuation now provides a powerful tool for placing wetlands on the agenda of conservation and development decision-makers.
  - Wetlands encompass a significant proportion of the area of the planet; the global estimate is 1280 million hectares and is recognized as an underestimate.
  - The degradation and loss of wetlands is more rapid than that for other ecosystems. Similarly, the status of both freshwater and coastal species is deteriorating faster than those of other ecosystems. Wetland-dependent biodiversity in many parts of the world is in continuing and accelerating decline.
  - Wetland loss and degradation has primarily been driven by land conversion and infrastructure development, water abstraction, eutrophication and pollution and over-exploitation. Losses tend to be more rapid where populations are increasing most, leading to demands for increased economic development. There are a number of broad, interrelated economic reasons, including perverse subsidies, why wetlands continue to be lost and degraded.
  - Global climate change is expected to further exacerbate the loss and degradation of wetland biodiversity including species that cannot relocate and migratory species that rely on a number of wetlands at different stages of their life cycle.
  - The continuing loss and degradation of wetlands are leading to reduction in the delivery of wetland ecosystem services, yet at the same time demand for these same services is projected to increase. [...]
  - Current use of two wetland ecosystem services - capture fisheries and freshwater - in some regions is now well beyond levels that can be sustained even at current demands, much less future ones. [...]
  - The projected continued loss and degradation of wetlands will result in further reduction in human well-being, especially for poorer people in less developed countries where technological solutions are not as readily available.
  - Successful achievement towards the Millennium Development Goals depends on maintaining or enhancing wetland ecosystem services. [...]
  - The priority when making choices about wetland management decisions is to ensure that the ecosystem services of the wetland are maintained. This can be achieved by application of the wise use principle of the Ramsar Convention.
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## Biodiversity – Life Insurance for our Changing World

On the eve of the 2005 World Summit – the high-level plenary meeting of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly in New York City, 14-16 September – the heads of the secretariats of the five global biodiversity-related conventions have issued a joint statement calling upon the world's leaders “to recognize that to make the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) a reality in a highly populated planet, biological diversity needs to be used sustainably and its benefits more equitably shared”. Their statement reviews the importance of maintaining biodiversity for the task of finding solutions for nearly all of the world's present and future challenges and ends by urging “governments and civil society to act in helping to conserve and use biological diversity sustainably, thus ensuring all a share in the benefits of a diverse world.”

The five biodiversity-related conventions are the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the World Heritage Convention.

The statement follows below:

“This week, in New York, leaders of the world will review progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals embody the international community's aspirations for a better world, where hunger and poverty are eradicated, all people enjoy basic rights, and equity and health prevail in all countries. We call upon the leaders to recognize that to make the MDGs a reality in a highly populated planet, biological diversity needs to be used sustainably and its benefits more equitably shared.

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth: genes, species, ecosystems. The services we use from ecosystems, such as clean water, food, fuel and fiber, medicines, and climate control, cannot be provided without biodiversity. Failure to conserve and use biological diversity sustainably will perpetuate inequitable and unsustainable growth, deeper poverty, new and more rampant illnesses, continued loss of species, and a world with ever-more degraded environments which are less healthy for people. Unless we change the way we use natural resources and distribute the wealth generated, the MDGs will be remembered only as a utopian ideal.

The importance of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to achieving the MDGs has

already been recognized by world leaders in their support for achieving a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 - the so-called 2010 target. They set this target because biodiversity is disappearing at an unacceptable rate as a result of human activities. Habitat conversion, overexploitation, pollution and climate change are driven by an ever increasing demand for natural resources. This requires urgent and concerted action. We must sustainably manage and protect biodiversity, guarantee the continued provision of ecosystem goods and services and ensure that the world has the capacity to adapt to future changes.

As advances in reducing poverty and improving well-being for our growing human population are made, we will more clearly understand the need for effectively functioning ecosystems. A wide range of crop and livestock genetic diversity is essential to ensure that our agro-systems can adapt to new challenges from climate, pests and diseases. The biological wealth in marine environments will be needed to feed growing populations and provide livelihoods for coastal communities around the world. Wetlands are needed as water regulators to protect us from floods and storm surges, to help in moderating climatic change with other ecosystems such as forests, and to act as living filters for pollutants and excess fertilizers. We must not forget that biodiversity is central to many of the world's cultures, the source of legend and myth, the inspiration for art and music. It is the basis for medicinal knowledge, drawing on the property of a variety of plants and animals for healing. Provision of these services across all these ecosystems depends on maintaining biological diversity.

We, the heads of the secretariats of the international Conventions dealing with biological diversity, emphasize the important role that biodiversity plays in the achievement of all the MDGs. Biodiversity can indeed help alleviate hunger and poverty, can promote good human health, and be the basis for ensuring freedom and equity for all. All of us rely on biodiversity, directly or indirectly for our health and welfare. The 2010 biodiversity target is thus the foundation for our well-being, and continued sustainable existence. We must ensure that biodiversity will be available for us, and for all future generations. We thus urge governments and civil society to act in helping to conserve and use biological diversity sustainably, thus ensuring all a share in the benefits of a diverse world.

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## Regional News

### News from Ireland: New peat power station

On 8 July 2005, the Irish Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen TD, officially opened the new West Offaly power station in Shannonbridge, Co Offaly. The 150Mw peat powered station, constructed by Foster Wheeler Energia Oy from Finland, is owned by the Irish Electricity Supply Board (ESB Power Generation) who invested more than 240 million euros in the project. Being the largest peat-fired power station in the world, this new state-of-the-art plant replaces the old Shannonbridge station, which has operated since 1965. The new fluidised bed technology in operation at West Offaly Power is more environmentally friendly producing fewer emissions than the previous plant and ensures at the same time continuity of employment in the midlands, in ESB as well as in Bord na Móna which provides the peat used as a fuel.

More info: <http://tinylink.com/?rK4CqQRDFi>.

### News from Wales: Bog snorkelling championships

On 29 August, Iain Hawkes, originally from Llandrindod Wells, triumphed in the world bog snorkelling championships in Llanwrtyd Wells in Powys. He took over from reigning champion Philip John, who had won for the previous three years. Competitors have to complete two lengths of a 60 yard trench cut through the Waen Rhydd peat bog in the quickest time possible, wearing snorkels and flippers (wet suits optional but advisable) but without using any conventional swimming strokes.

The contest began after a pub conversation when a local charity was searching for fundraising ideas. This year's contest was the 20th annual event, and organisers dug a second trench in expectation of a record number of competitors. After beating more than 150 entrants, Mr Hawkes, 26, said that the reigning champion's absence helped him take the title. "The lad who has been winning it for the last few years - he is a real flier - he wasn't here this year," he said.

"I think this is about my fifth time - I have got to be good at something - I was useless on my GCSEs, never went to uni, but I am champion of the bog snorkelling." He said conditions had been tough, but mostly for those watching. "I felt sorry for the spectators - they must have been freezing - it chucked it down for most of the day."

The prize for the slowest competitor went to Angela Glendenny, a 70-year-old from Newcastle-under-Lyme. Speaking before the race, organiser Gordon Green said the event appeared to be "more popular than ever."

Source: BBC News

### News from the EU: input need into Structural Funds strategic guidelines

The Strategic Guidelines for the use of the Structural Funds have been published on the internet for a stakeholder consultation and can be found on the following website:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/index_en.htm)

Interested parties are invited to deliver their comments before September 30. For nature conservation, the following references in the strategic guidelines for structural funds seem relevant:

- addressing the significant needs for investment in infrastructure, particularly in the Convergence regions, particularly in the new Member States, to comply with environmental legislation in the fields of water, waste, air, and nature and species protection.
- ensuring that attractive conditions exist for businesses and their highly-skilled staff. This can be ensured by promoting land-use planning which reduces urban sprawl, and by rehabilitating the physical environment, including natural and cultural assets. Investments in this area should be clearly linked to the development of innovative and job-creating businesses on the sites concerned.
- promoting, in addition to the investments in sustainable energy and transport covered elsewhere, investments that contribute to the EU Kyoto commitments.
- undertaking risk prevention measures through improved management of natural resources, more targeted research and better use of ICTs, and more innovative public management policies.

It's the nature conservation people, who need to make sure that all member states do something with these issues in their programmes for structural funds for 2007 to 2013.

For more information, contact Arjen Berkhuysen:  
[a.berkhuysen@snm.nl](mailto:a.berkhuysen@snm.nl)

### European Parliament breathes LIFE into environment

The European Parliament struck a blow for the environment against the European Commission by overturning the Commission's plans to weaken the EU's Financial Instrument for the Environment, known as 'LIFE+'.

The Parliament dismissed the Commission's move to axe the EU's only dedicated nature conservation programme, currently called LIFE Nature, which has been a major success for EU environmental efforts. This is seen as a significant move to help implement

the EU's commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. It would help protect and revive Europe's most valued sites and species.

Parliament also made the first major move in getting a significant increase in funding by voting for a budget increase of nearly five times the Commission's figure: 9.5 billion Euro over seven years instead of 2 billion Euro. This was seen as a move to help properly finance the EU's network of 18,000 protected sites that have until now received minimal EU funds.

Environmental groups have welcomed the Parliament's Resolution and hope this will send a strong message to the UK Presidency and to Member States that they should honour their environmental commitments. If Heads of State sign up to ambitious targets, such as halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010, the necessary tools and resources must be secured. Again and again surveys have shown that the environment is a top priority amongst Europe's citizens.

Environment Ministers from all twenty five Member States will now have to negotiate a joint position in response to the Parliamentary Resolution. The UK Presidency has hinted it aims to decide on a response by December this year.

### EU Ecolabel and peat



The third meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) for the revision of the European Eco-label criteria to Soil Improvers and Growing Media will be held in Amsterdam, October 31, 2005. At present, as far as the application of peat is concerned, there is consensus on the (continued) exclusion of peat in soil improvers. On the possible application of peat in growing media, the opinions are diverse. Arguments pro and contra are valued differently by the various stakeholder groups. In order to draft a proposal that would receive sufficient support by the EUEB, the Competent Bodies (CBs) were asked to express their preference for one of the following options:

- no inclusion of peat;
- allowing a certain percentage of peat in growing media for professional applications;
- allowing a certain percentage of peat given tight restrictions.

The consultation of the CBs shows that there is certainly support for allowing a percentage of peat, in particular in professional applications. However, for the CBs that are opposed, the peat issue seems to be a crucial one, much more so than to those who are in favour. Therefore it is proposed not to admit peat to the revised European Eco-label. The result may be a continued low (or zero) response to the European Eco-label by growing media producers.

The main arguments brought forward by the CBs for excluding peat from Eco-labelled products:

- Peat is not a renewable material. Legitimate extraction still occurs on peatlands designated for nature conservation, and on sites proposed as Natura 2000 sites. This extraction is due to historical precedence rather than to wise use;
- In some applications, there are proven alternatives for peat (such as products based on coir and wood products). Admitting peat in growing media will undermine the credibility of the Eco-label. It will be a significant change to the existing criteria for which no convincing justification is available.

Arguments in favour of allowing peat under strict criteria in Eco-labelled Growing Media:

- Peat extraction is strictly controlled and subject to permits in all EU Member States. If desired, it would be possible to set even more strict requirements for peat extraction to ensure a high level of environmental protection;
- In particular in professional applications, composts and other waste derived products are in their pure form not really suited as growing media. For example their potassium (K) content is in general too high. A co-constituent is needed to come to a well balanced product. Peat proves most effective in compensating many of the less favourable characteristics of waste products. Allowing a certain percentage of peat will therefore stimulate the development and substantial application of mixtures with a high ratio of waste derived products.

In view of the above, the Competent Bodies were asked to express their preference for one of the following statements:

- Allowing peat in growing media is the wrong signal to consumers. It will obstruct the development of peat free products. Furthermore, it will undermine the credibility of the European Eco-label. We accept that this may result in a possible low (or zero) interest by applicants for professional growing media.
- The environment would benefit most by the maximum application of waste derived materials throughout the market of growing media. A strategy of progressive peat dilution is more effective in this than an absolute ban. Therefore, a certain level of peat produced under tight restrictions should be allowed in Eco-label products.
- In the hobby market, admitting peat may undermine the credibility of the European Eco-label and frustrate the position of peat free alternatives. At the same time, in professional applications, a continued ban on peat will obstruct the use of peat alternatives in horticulture. A pragmatic approach could be to hold on to the ban on peat in hobby products (growing media) but to allow a certain percentage of peat in professional applications, with strict requirements on peat extraction.

An additional point that needs to be stressed is that thus far the take up of the EU Ecolabel has been low. In total there are only about 240 products that carry it. This is not because there are only a limited number of products that meet the ecolabel standards. Rather, there are many products that easily could apply and receive the label, but simply do not. Although some companies report positive effects of the ecolabel as a marketing tool, others are still waiting for benefits. This is likely because the consumer recognition in the various member states is generally low.

All in all, this suggests that the high criteria should be maintained. Consumer recognition will not increase when the criteria are more lenient. The focus should be on getting more existing products to carry the current strict version of the ecolabel, thus increasing its status and recognition and making it more interesting for companies to apply.

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#### **News from Austria: 2 new peatland Ramsar sites**

The Government of Austria has designated two mire sites for the List of Wetlands of International Importance. One of them, in the Tyrol in the west of the country, just to the north of Innsbruck, is part of a mire ecosystem that may become a transboundary Ramsar site with German Bavaria. The other is a mosaic of varied wetland types along a small valley in the south, in Carinthia or Kärnten near Klagenfurt. The site named "Bayerische Wildalm and Wildalmfilz" in the Tyrol (133 hectares, 47°35'N 011°48'E), already a European Natura 2000 site, is a large fen area covering the bottom and the slopes of a karst depression with a natural brook that vanishes into a ponor (polje, or swallow hole). In addition, there is a so-called saddle bog connected by fens and wet meadows to the southern slopes. Situated on the border between two biogeographical regions, the Northern Prealps and Flysch Zone and the Northern Limestone Alps, the site supports typical endangered mire plant communities for both regions. As with all mires of the Tyrol, the site is protected by the conservation law and peat extraction or drainage of mires is prohibited. Following the natural extent of the mires, the nomination of a transboundary site designation with the German part of the Bayerische Wildalm is in preparation.

The "Moor- und Seenlandschaft Keutschach-Schiefling" (543 hectares, 46°35'N 014°08'E), within a Carinthian conservation area, is made up of ten areas along the 12.5 km long valley, comprising four greater lakes (Keutschacher See, Hafnersee, Rauschelesee, Bassgeigensee), some ponds, and a mosaic of various wetland types, such as tall sedge and herb communities, wet grassland, elements of raised bog, damp meadows, tree-dominated swamps, black elder swamp forests, birch tree and willow tree

swamp forests. This high variety supports many animal species, such as butterflies, insects and birds which are associated with these wetland plant communities, as well as snails, amphibians and dragonflies which need the ponds and other open water areas for reproduction. Until ca.1970 most of the moist meadows were cultivated for horse-hay and litter, but with the abandonment of these land uses perennial herbs, reeds, bushes, followed by black elders, birches, willow-trees and pines have spread over the area. A site management plan has been elaborated as part of the Ramsar designation process, and it includes education facilities such as guiding for visitors and a biking trail.

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#### **News from Bulgaria: Amendments stopped**

Proposed amendments to the Bulgarian Nature Protection and Biodiversity Acts, which if passed would have had serious negative consequences for biodiversity and nature protection in Bulgaria, were stopped.

The bills submitted by the Council of Ministers in the Bulgarian National Assembly in late 2004 would have provided opportunities for construction, privatisation and exclusion of territories from protected areas as well as considerable limitation of the scope of the EU's Natura 2000 network. They also would have permitted restrictions of public participation and consultation from the Natura 2000 site designation and amendment processes.

Bulgarian NGOs formed a coalition to campaign against the proposed amendments early this year. The coalition held meetings with members of parliament, politicians and journalists, and attracted publicity to the issue and public support. Almost 4000 letters were sent by Bulgarian citizens to the national parliament and the Prime Minister from the web site of the campaign ([www.bluelink.net/np-campaign](http://www.bluelink.net/np-campaign), in Bulgarian and English). The campaign has also had very intensive national media coverage.

As part of these efforts, a position paper signed by Euronatur, Plantlife, EUCC Coastal Union, Europarc, the International Mire Conservation Group, CEEWEB, and WWF was submitted to the Bulgarian national assembly expressing our concerns regarding the proposed legislation. IUCN and BirdLife International also expressed their concerns to the Bulgarian authorities.

As a result of these joint efforts, the Bulgarian Parliament has not considered the bills for amendments, which expired with the dissolution of the Parliament in May 2005.

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### **News from Poland: Is the Rospuda river valley lost?**

The decision has been taken. The by-pass road of Augustów will be built in the planned variant crossing the Rospuda mires. The General Management of the State Roads and Highways (GDDKiA) has obtained a permission to start building the road.

Before the decision was official, the GDDKiA had already started preparatory works in the area of the planned road, when archeological works were performed. Foresters are ready to start cutting down trees along the section that is to go through the woodlands. The closer the decision came, the more the attention paid by the authorities to the protests of NGOs and scientists declined. It was clear that the proponents of building the by-pass road of Augustów in the planned variant wanted to quickly finish the administrative procedure and to go ahead with the investment.

The Ministry of Environment takes an ambiguous stand. On the one hand the Ministry supports the efforts to protect the Rospuda river valley, on the other hand it seems to procrastinate. This is illustrated by the response from the Polish Minister of Environment to the IMCG resolution to Poland. The response was sent on 21st July 2005. It is in Polish. An English summary is provided below.

“In response to your letter concerning the possibility of including the mires in the Rospuda river valley in the Ramsar list and protecting its nature values I would like to inform you that:

“The Rospuda river valley with its vast mires is in fact an especially valuable natural habitat for wild flora and fauna, particularly waterfowl. For this reason I support your proposal to include this especially valuable area in the Ramsar list in the future. However, this must be preceded by creating a nature reserve in this area. Afterwards the site can be included in the Ramsar list compliant with the Ramsar Convention procedures.

Currently this especially valuable area is not completely devoid of legal protection. Since 1992 it has been a part of the Area of Protected Landscape “Rospuda river valley”, a great part of which has been included in the Special Protection Area PLB 200002. Moreover, the area has gained acceptance of the Council for the Protection of Nature of the Podlasie Voivodeship, concerning changing its legal status in the future.

However, there are two problems connected with raising the protection status of this area and designating it a nature reserve. The first one is a complicated ownership structure – many small private allotments scattered throughout the area. That causes incredible difficulties in establishing a nature reserve there. The second problem is the vicinity of a planned by-pass road of Augustów accompanying the construction of the expressway Via Baltica. It is very

difficult to balance the demands of development of road infrastructure and the needs of nature protection and to find a compromise. The subject mentioned above has been discussed for a long time and the detailed analysis of an impact of the investment on the nature in this area has been done. The already prepared technical documentation aims to minimize the possible negative impact on the nature values of this area. At present the investor (GDDKiA) has prepared an Environmental Impact Assessment and has applied to the Voivode of Podlasie for permission to start building the road.

To sum up, I state that the Rospuda river valley really deserves to be legally protected as a nature reserve which can be in the future included in the Ramsar list. This would be a fulfilment of Poland’s obligations highlighted in the IMCG resolution.”

After comparing this answer with the text of the IMCG resolution, it becomes obvious that the answer is not really an answer to the requests included in the resolution. The main point of the resolution concerned the road crossing the Rospuda mires, while in the answer the problem of the road is considered marginally. Moreover, instead of specifying its stand, the Ministry of Environment just lists the well-known facts. Although the special nature value of the Rospuda river valley is emphasised, there is no statement ensuring that the Ministry will make an effort to try to solve the problems arising from the conflict between nature protection and demands of economic development. The Ministry confirms only that the valley is valuable and worth protection. The question of how to meet the needs of protection seems not to be of interest to the Ministry.

Although chances of changing the situation of the Rospuda river valley seemed to be slim, there was some hope connected with a letter of request sent to the European Commission in June. However, the administrative procedure in Poland is almost finished and the beginning of field works seems to be a question of a short time, probably shorter than the one needed by the EC to react.

Ewa Jabłońska

Go to the IMCG website to find more information. There you may also find a link to a petition, thus far signed more than 2.400 times.

### **News from Russia Russian Peatland Wise Use Workshop**

From 21 to 25 September 2005, a Peatlands Wise Use workshop took place in Russia. The meeting started with two days in Moscow hosted by the Russian Ministry of Nature Resources and then moved to Tver Oblast where one of the two sites of the Russian Component of the UNEP-GEF project on Peatland Biodiversity and Climate Change is located. In Tver the meeting was hosted by Tver Technical



University. The meeting was attended by 64 Russian and 12 foreign participants, representing regional and national governments, conservation NGOs, the peat industry, and the international community (the Ramsar Convention, peatland scientists, NGOs).

One of the purposes of the meeting was to develop a resolution to stimulate / feed into the review of the current Russian "Action Plan for Peatland Conservation and Wise Use in Russia". The other aim was to present and discuss peatland wise use manuals and recommendations, developed by experts within the Wetlands International "Russian Peatland Project" during the last two years.

Two field trips were organised. One visited the "Crane Homeland" in the Taldom District of Moscow oblast, where we could see peatland restoration projects implemented by NGOs and take part in a meeting with the local Administration (where we could also enjoy a children folk dancing group). The Administration has a GIS system for ecological friendly decision making that was developed within the PIN Matra funded project "Peatlands of Central Russia" and was presented by Olga Grinchenko.

The second field trip was to the totally transformed Galytsky Mokh peatland in the Tver region, where Vladimir Panov presented all the ways that different types of extracted peatlands may naturally regenerate. The agenda was very busy, but anyway everybody had the chance to share ideas.



*The excursion on Galitsky Mokh, Tver region*

### **Petrozavodsk meeting in honour of 1930!**

On 30 August – 2 September 2005, a Symposium "Mire Ecosystems of Northern Europe" was convoked by the Mire Science Laboratory of the Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (headed by Oleg Kuznetsov). Special reason was the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the 1930 generation that brought us such an extraordinary collection of notorious mire scientists, including Tatjana Yurkovskaja, Rauno Ruuhijärvi, Seppo Euroola, and Yrjö Vasari.

The symposium was attended by 54 participants including 15 guests from Finland and Norway. It was a fruitful meeting, not only for the jubilees but also

because of the contributions by young scientists. It was very encouraging to see excellent presentations and posters from Syktyvkar and Moscow, Yaroslavl, Izhevsk, and Chelybinsk presented by PhD students. We thank the Karelian friends for their enthusiasm to support mire science, for the excellent organisation and for the good science!

Tatiana Minayeva



*The legendary 1930 generation. Rauno Ruuhijärvi (left), Tatjana Yurkovskaja, Seppo Euroola*

### **Siberian Peatlands Thawing**

The world's largest frozen peatland area, stretching for a million square kilometres across Western Siberia, is melting and will turn into a lake landscape, the New Scientists warns.

Western Siberia has warmed faster than almost anywhere else on the planet, with an increase in average temperatures of some 3 °C in the last 40 years. The warming is believed to be a combination of man-made climate change, a cyclical change in atmospheric circulation known as the Arctic oscillation, plus feedbacks caused by melting ice, which exposes bare ground and ocean. These absorb more solar heat than white ice and snow. Similar warming has also been taking place in Alaska.

This thawing will lead to the release of massive amounts of carbon, which will further speed up global warming and therewith permafrost thawing.

Source: [www.newscientist.com/channel/earth/mg18725124.500](http://www.newscientist.com/channel/earth/mg18725124.500)

### **Fires in Eastern Siberia**

Uncontrollable forest and peatland fires blazing throughout Russia's Far Eastern Khabarovsk territory have prompted local authorities to announce an emergency situation in three of the territory's districts. In the meantime, the amount of smoke hovering above Khabarovsk, the administrative center of the territory, has reached double the permissible norm.

Aviation has been brought in to help firefighters extinguish the 20-odd forest fires raging on the Khabarovsk territory, which have by now spread across an aggregate space of 45,000 hectares.



### **News from Georgia** **Ramsar Mission visits Kulevi**

Since 2000 the Kulevi oil terminal is being constructed within the “Central Wetlands of Kolkheti” Ramsar site in Georgia.

The Ramsar Site N°893 “Wetlands of Central Kolkheti” consists of three peatland complexes Anaklia-Churia, Nabada and Pichora-Paliastomi with lake Paliastomi and the adjoining wet forests and coastal Black Sea areas as well as the mouths and lowermost parts of the Khobi and Rioni rivers, covering a total of 33,710 ha (55,500 ha including the marine part) in the central part of the Black Sea coastal alluvial plain. The site supports a wealth of relict and endemic flora and fauna species. The vegetation consists of typical bog and fen species, with freshwater marshes and brackish areas. Since 1999, the main part of the Ramsar Site is included in Kolkheti National Park ([www.knp.ge](http://www.knp.ge))

Upon invitation of the Georgian Ministry of Environment, a Ramsar Advisory Mission took place from 14-19 August 2005 to provide advice to the preparation of a compensation package.

The report of this mission comments on the ‘urgent national interests’ that Georgia brings forward for constructing the terminal: “Aspects of long-term sustainability should not be undervalued when evoking urgent national interests”. Without implementing an integrated coastal zone development plan, Georgia might lose some of its unique natural and cultural heritage in the Kolkheti (or Colchis) plain. An area that is internationally renowned for its endemic species and the biodiversity assemblages that survived during the last glaciations in this unique European refuge area with a subtropical climate. “Is it worthwhile losing these assets for short-term development gains?” the (draft) report asks.

Furthermore, the report discusses a number of concrete proposals for compensation, including the creation of additional nature reserves, the restoration of formerly degraded natural habitats, the establishment of a museum and visitor centre, and/or the publication of a specific monograph, besides scientific articles in specialized journals, to “conserve” the rich archaeological heritage of human settlements at Khobi river mouth, the planting of tree shelter strips to compensate the loss of the wet forest area to be cleared when constructing the railway dam, a hydrological assessment of groundwater flows (both fresh inland and brackish coastal) possibly disrupted or altered by the dam, the need for animal migration tunnels underneath the dam, the protection against wetland and groundwater pollution in the event of an oil spill accident, etc..

The rail track will cross an extremely sensible area between the coastal zone and the unique Nabada mire complex. An oil spill accident could have disastrous and lasting consequences. Although this area has already in the past been influenced by human alterations (when the suspended bridge across Rioni river was still providing a direct link between Poti

town and Kulevi village), the planned construction of a heavy duty rail track will provoke ecological impacts of a much greater order and destroy an important surface of valuable natural habitats (notably specific Colchic swamp forests) and lands used by local people for grazing and fuel wood collection. The compensation study will have to assess these impacts and their need for compensation and make concrete proposals where to plant new swamp forests.

Also the boundaries of both Kolkheti National Park and Ramsar Site N°893 should be improved. The Ramsar Site currently covers a substantially smaller area than the National Park, such as in the forests east of Imnati peatland and Lake Paliastomi. The Ramsar Site should be expanded to cover at least the area of the National Park, but also an external buffer zone.

The full Ramsar Advisory Mission report will soon be available on [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

### **News from Mongolia**

The Scientific Conference devoted to 35 years of Joint Russian-Mongolian Complex Biological Expeditions of the Russian and Mongolian Academies of Sciences, that took place in Ulaanbaatar 5 – 9 September 2005, addressed a new topic for Mongolia: mires and peatlands. The impact of two presentations on mires and peatlands (Minayeva et al.: Peatlands of Mongolia: first study results; Sirin et al.: Peatland ecosystems as desertification processes indicators) was so significant that the priority to monitor the status of peatlands was stressed in the final conference resolution. For more information: Tatiana Minayeva: [tminayeva@wwf.ru](mailto:tminayeva@wwf.ru)

### **News from South East Asia:** **Fire, fire, fire...**

With large forest fires in South-East Asia, notably in Indonesia, causing serious health and environmental problems, including a choking haze, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) called for strict enforcement of the ban against using fires for agricultural purposes. Most of these fires are intentional and planned by agro-industrial companies to clear forests for agricultural land use. Using fire to clear forests is prohibited in most of the South-East Asian countries and the ban should urgently be enforced. Instead, tree and vegetation residues should be used better, or destroyed mechanically to protect human health and the environment.

Instead of burning forest residues, machines could be used for chipping wood and using it for compost, while precious wood could be used for wood products. Mechanical clearing of forest residues is more expensive, but more environmentally-friendly.

There is a high demand for wood in the region; wood should therefore not be wasted or burned.

In close collaboration with governments, FAO has started to prepare voluntary guidelines for fire management and the provision of financial resources for forestry agencies. Regional and sub-regional cooperation agreements on fire management have helped to reduce the impact of fires.

In South-East Asia, large-scale conversion of forests into agricultural land occurs mainly in flat areas with peat soils. Large amounts of smoke result from fires burning deep down into the peat. These fires are almost impossible to extinguish, regardless of how many fire-fighting airplanes or helicopters are used.

So long as people do not understand the dangers of using fires for land clearance on peat soils, the fight against forest fires will be very costly and have only limited success.

Source: <http://www.un.org>

### Cloud seeding to stop smoke

Cloud seeding is being planned by the Meteorological Services Department of Malaysia to create rain to douse smoking embers in peat forests in Selangor which have polluted the air in Kuala Selangor.

The Department of Environment (DOE) said that the fires in the affected forests had been put out but they were still giving out smoke. The affected areas are the peat forests in Parit 13, Jalan Sungai Tenggi and near Agrotechnology Park beside the Raja Muda Musa forest reserve in Batang Berjuntai, Kuala Selangor. Several fires were also detected in the peat forests in Kampung Lombong, Bukit Kemuning in Mukim Tanjung Dua Belas (Kuala Langat) and Parit 7 and 8, Sungai Panjang (Sabak Bernam); bushes in Taman Changgang Jaya (Phase 2); and an oil palm plantation in Sungai Belankan, Sepang.

Fire and Rescue Department personnel are continuing their operations to control the situation

Source: <http://www.bernama.com.my/bernama/v3/news.php?id=155838>

For more on the fires in South East Asia, surf to:  
<http://www.haze-online.or.id/index.php>

### GPI Receives Funding for Tropical Peat Swamp Forest Project

The Global Peatland Initiative (GPI) has received an official invitation from the Dutch GIS/Ministry of Foreign Affairs to lead the development of a proposal for the implementation of the "Central Kalimantan Peat Swamp Rehabilitation and Management Programme". The total available budget for the Central Kalimantan project is 5 million euros for a period of two years. Within the next weeks, GPI

together with local stakeholder organizations and the government will work on the proposal, focusing on the programme's implementation and identifying roles, mechanisms and options for its rapid and smooth mobilization. More information on the project and on the GPI can be obtained from <http://www.peatlands.org>.

### News from Canada:

#### Peat touted as cleaner alternative to coal

Peat Resources Ltd. of Toronto is trying to raise \$120 million to build a production facility to supply fuel to two electricity generation plants in northwestern Ontario that currently burn coal. The facility would convert peat from a 5,500-sq.-km area in northwestern Ontario into a replacement fuel for the generation plants at Atikokan and Thunder Bay. The plant would produce one million tonnes of peat fuel pellets annually.

The provincial government plans to close the province's six coal-fired power plants by 2007 to reduce air pollution and improve the health of Ontarians. The plants produce about 25 per cent of Ontario's electricity.

Several power-generating projects have been announced to replace the 9,700 megawatts produced by the coal-fired plants, including using natural gas, reactivating nuclear plants and renewable energy. So far, there are no plans to use peat. Ontario's peat reserves, which are estimated to be about 10 per cent of the world's total, are extracted only for agriculture purposes. Ontario reserves are equivalent to about 14 billion tonnes of coal. The peat-extraction area in northwestern Ontario that Peat Resources has permits to mine is more than eight times the size of Metropolitan Toronto.

It is obvious that burning peat instead of coal is only viable, because of the current anti-coal sentiment in Ontario. Combined with the increasing cost of conventional fuels, peat becomes a possible fuel source. Coal politics is driving this.

Source: <http://www.businessedge.ca>

#### Canada lobbies U.S. on ANWR oil drillings

The Canadian government has joined activist efforts to prevent oil drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Citing a 1987 bi-lateral agreement to protect the Porcupine River caribou herd that migrates from the Canadian Yukon to ANWR's coastal plain each year, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew is urging the U.S. to honor its 18-year commitment by halting its drilling plans.

The complain is that hurricane damage is being used to justify the ANWR drilling plan, using energy security as a rationale to promote the development of petroleum resources in the Arctic National Wildlife

Refuge. The minimal oil resources in the Arctic Refuge would not make a timely or significant contribution to U.S. energy supplies. The Canadian government is exploring various legal moves to force the United States to abide by the caribou herd protection agreement.

The Bush administration has been trying in vain to get approval for drilling in ANWR since 2001. Meanwhile, Congressional Democrats and environmentalists have been rallying support to permanently designate the disputed lands as wilderness off-limits to development and resource extraction.

By adding the drilling provision into its budget bill this past spring, though, Bush's Republican allies in the Senate were able to prevent opponents across the aisle from filibustering the controversial proposal. Now, Congressional Democrats can only stop the plan by voting down the entire budget bill, which provides funding for homeland security, the war in Iraq and hurricane relief, among other national priorities. House and Senate leaders hope to reconcile their respective budget bills by the end of October, giving environmentalists – and Canadians – a scant few weeks to lobby for the elimination of the drilling provision.

Source: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/>

### **News from South Africa: Peatlands under attack**

South Africa's peatlands and mires are under attack. Developers are at present engaged in a land grab to secure the last remaining mires for peat mining, such as at the Gerhard Minnebron peatland. Equally worrisome is the destruction of peatland swamp forests for the establishment of commercial banana and amandumbé plantations in the rural areas of Maputland, many of these in the Greater St Lucia World Heritage and Ramsar sites

This situation is compounded by the lack of a national policy on the mining of peat and on the management of peatlands in general. The inability of South Africa government departments to coordinate, implement and enforce effective water and environmental legislation is contributing even more to chaos on the ground.

The question is, who is using peat related products? Are it the poor people of South Africa? Yes, perhaps to some extent in case of the swamp forests in Maputland. But even there the more affluent in the local communities control the trade. Really profiting from and responsible for one of the most unsustainable and unwise practices of wetland use in the world, is the mushroom and potting soil industry. Peat is mined so that less than 5 % of the population can enjoy cheap mushrooms and potting soils while the rest of the country suffers under a shortage of readily available clean water.

What is the real cost of our mushrooms? Peatlands store and filter water and they mitigate global climatic impacts. South Africa is a country where the average yearly rainfall of 497 mm is well below the world average (800 mm/a), and where more than 20% (up to 70 % in some rural areas) of the people do not have access to water for basic human needs. Latest research results clearly indicate that most of South Africa's rivers are severely degraded.

Can we afford to undermine the filters and sponges of our rivers? Can we allow the destruction of our own life support systems so that a few individuals can enrich themselves to the detriment of most of the inhabitants of our country? Perhaps it is time to determine the true cost of mushrooms in this country. The question remains whether someone in government is prepared to take the initiative and stands up in support for South Africa's already excellent wetland legislation.

### **Fires in the KwaZulu-Natal Wetland Park**

KwaZulu-Natal was one of 4 provinces affected by fires believed to have started by lightning strikes. The fires were fanned by heavy winds and fuelled by hot, dry conditions.

It is estimated that 4500 ha of the Wetland Park were burnt in 10 separate fires. The affected areas were mainly the incorporated commercial plantations of SiyaQhubeka and Komatiland (formerly SAFCOL) on the Western shores of Lake St. Lucia. Makatana Bay Lodge on the Western Shores was evacuated as a precautionary measure but was fully operational the next day again.

The dry reed beds of the ecologically sensitive Mfabeni Swamps on the Eastern Shores were also burnt. Fortunately the fire did not get into the important peat beds and a quick recovery of the reeds is expected. No animals were lost in the runaway blaze and minor damage to infrastructure, i.e. game fences, is already in the process of being repaired. The State Forest Plantations around Mbazwana near Sodwana Bay were also gutted in a separate fire.

Rains and less windy conditions have helped get the last few remaining fires under control.

### **News from Iraq: Marshlands recover**

A rare good news from Iraq generated much discussion when UNEP reported that satellite images have shown a remarkable recovery rate for the ancient Iraqi marshlands, which had been drained during the Saddam Hussein regime. The findings come from the newly launched Iraqi Marshlands Observation System (IMOS), the latest component of UNEP's multi-million dollar marshlands project. This marshland was one of the world's largest wetlands and the largest wetland ecosystem in the Middle East

and Western Eurasia. Its role in providing a crucial route for migratory birds, supporting the marine ecosystem of the Persian Gulf and sustaining freshwater fisheries made it important on the map of the area. It totalled almost 9000 sq km in the 1970s. During the Saddam Hussein regime the area had shrunk by almost 90 percent of its original area. A combination of dams and canals had been built, which blocked water from the marshes turning the once flourishing region to resemble a semi-desert.

This had urged some experts in 2001 to predict the disappearance of the marshland by 2008. However after the end of the Saddam regime former residents of the area began to consistently break these barriers letting water flow freely in the region again. The proof of their action lies in the positive picture portrayed by the satellite images of the region. Let us hope the wetlands regain its former glory!

Source: <http://www.gisdevelopment.net/>

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For freely accessible dossiers, surf to: <http://www.scidev.net/dossiers/>

### Wetland Information Centre

The U.S. National Academies is pleased to announce the launch of its Water Information Center, a portal of more than 100 peer-reviewed reports from the National Academies on water-related issues. The website (<http://water.nationalacademies.org>) aims to assist the work of water scientists, engineers, managers, policy-makers, and students throughout the world. These reports represent independent and objective consensus among experts from academia, industry, and other entities.

The website features the following major topics:

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- Water Science and Research

All of the reports can be read for free on-line, and summaries are freely downloadable as PDFs. People from developing countries can download the full PDF reports for free. A large number of reports are also available to free download for residents of other countries.

For questions or comments, contact:  
Ellen de Guzman, [water@nas.edu](mailto:water@nas.edu)

### Biodiversity in Impact Assessment

Given the importance of applying impact assessment techniques to situations where the ecological character of wetland sites may be threatened by developments or broader policies and strategies, the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) has prepared a document 'Biodiversity in Impact Assessment'. It sets out best practice principles for incorporating biodiversity issues into Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for projects, and strategic environmental assessment (SEA) for policies, plans and programs.

The document is available as PDF on the IAIA website:  
[www.iaia.org/Non\\_Members/Pubs\\_Ref\\_Material/SP3.pdf](http://www.iaia.org/Non_Members/Pubs_Ref_Material/SP3.pdf)

### **Swedish National Wetland Inventory**

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency has announced that the Swedish National Wetland Inventory is now available on the Internet at <http://www-vmi.slu.se> (information so far in Swedish only).

### **Malahide May 24-27th, 2005 - Conference report including final message from Malahide**

The Final Report of the Malahide Conference 'Biodiversity and the EU' has recently been published by the Irish Government. The report includes the final definitive text of the 'Message from Malahide' which identifies priority objectives and targets to 1) deliver the Gothenburg commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity (in the EU) by 2010, and 2) optimise the EU contribution to the Johannesburg commitment to significantly reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity (worldwide) by 2010.

The full report is available as a pdf file online at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/biodiversity/develop\\_biodiversity\\_policy/malahide\\_conference/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/biodiversity/develop_biodiversity_policy/malahide_conference/index_en.htm)

All documents tabled at the Conference are available at the same website.

### **Schuyt, K. 2005. Freshwater and Poverty Reduction: Serving People, Saving Nature – An economic analysis of the livelihood impacts of freshwater conservation initiatives. WWF-International**

The availability and functioning of freshwater ecosystems have a significant impact on the livelihoods, health and security of the poor. Freshwater services include food, drinking water, building materials, nutrient recycling and flood control. Furthermore, the harmful effects of ecosystem service degradation are often being borne disproportionately by the poor and are in many cases the principal drivers of poverty and social conflict. It is therefore essential to recognize and integrate the links between freshwater resources management and livelihoods into freshwater conservation work.

This report presents four cases where the work of WWF and its partner organizations has not only successfully led to improved management of freshwater resources, but also significantly contributed to the improvement of livelihoods of poor local communities. The four cases are: (1) the Working for Wetlands Project in South Africa; (2) the Dongting Lake Floodplain Restoration Project in China; (3) the Várzea Project in Brazil; and (4) the La Cocha Project in Colombia. These cases are based on separate socio-economic studies conducted in these four projects (see page 34 for the acknowledgements for these studies and Annex 1 for the analytical framework applied in these studies).

The report can be downloaded here: [www.panda.org/downloads/freshwater/servingpeoplesavingnature.pdf](http://www.panda.org/downloads/freshwater/servingpeoplesavingnature.pdf)

### **Metera, D., Pezold, T. & Piwowarski, W. (eds) 2005. Implementation of Natura 2000 in the New EU Member States of Central Europe: Assessment Report. IUCN Programme Office for Central Europe**

Successful implementation of the European Ecological Network, Natura 2000, is the main goal of nature conservation on a European Union level. This report summarises the efforts for the region. Experts from NGOs of eight new Central European Member States of the EU i.e. the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia were invited to fill in questionnaires concerning different aspects of Natura 2000 implementation in their countries. The comments are subjective and according to the individual authors of the questionnaires, which have been edited together to form a country-by-country panorama.

The analyses include the procedure and methods of Natura 2000 sites designation, NGOs and local communities involvement in the process, national and international cohesion of the network, Natura 2000 financing system, and adaptation of national legislation to the Birds and Habitats Directives. The report further shows the status of the Natura 2000 network in the different countries, the number of sites and their area, the attitude of the national NGOs concerning the governmental proposal, and the status of Shadow Lists for submission to the European Commission as an amendment or alternative to the governmental proposal.

The report is available for download, here: [http://www.iucn-ce.org/documents/natura2000/natura2000\\_ce.pdf](http://www.iucn-ce.org/documents/natura2000/natura2000_ce.pdf)

### **Whitten, S. & Bennett, J. 2005. The Private and Social Values of Wetlands. Edward Elgar. 208 p. €73**

The management of natural resources located on private lands often involves a perceived conflict between the mix of private and public benefit outputs they produce. The goal of this book is to advance the design of policy relating to the production of wetland outputs on private lands.

### **Fraser, L.A. & Keddy, P.A. 2005. The World's Largest Wetlands. Cambridge University Press 488 p. €99**

During the past century approximately fifty percent of the world's wetlands have been destroyed, largely due to human activities. Increased human population has led to shrinkage of wetland areas, and data show that as they shrink their important functions decline. Reduced wetland area causes more flooding in spring, less available water during drought, greater risk of water pollution, and less food production and reduced carbon storage.

**Tourbières : le point pour leur gestion. Espaces naturels, n°11, July 2005, p. 7-20 & p. 38-39 (in French)**

This special issue of *Espaces Naturels* focuses on peatlands, presenting a series of articles on peatlands (hydrology, micro-organisms, *Sphagna*) and on conservation measures (restoration after drainage, agri-environmental measures, networks). To acquire a copy (9,50 €), contact :

Pole.tourbieres@enf-conservatoires.org

**Michelot, J-M. 2005. Caractérisation des zones humides. Ministère de l'Ecologie et du Développement Durable. 70 p. (in French)**

This report synthesises the findings of the PNRZH (National Research Programme on Wetlands), launched in 1996 for better understanding wetland ecosystems and arriving at methods of management and restoration. After a first volume on "water and the wetlands", this book deals with inventory and delineation. There are four parts make: wetland indicators, wetland typology, wetland dynamics and monitoring tools. The book can be obtained free of charge from the Ministère de l'Ecologie et du Développement Durable:

veronique.barre@ecologie.gouv.fr

**Cubizolle, H. 2005. Paléoenvironnement et turfigenèse : l'apport de l'étude des tourbières à la connaissance de l'évolution holocène des milieux montagnards du Massif Central oriental granitique. Université de Limoges. Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches. 750 p. (in French)**

This thesis covers 132 peat bogs of the granitic Eastern Massif Central. Two major classes of peatlands (ombrotrophic and minerotrophic) were subdivided into various categories. The geographical distribution of these is shown as a result from a combination of physical factors (altitude, climate) and human impact. Carbon dating carried out on 64 peat bogs showed that peat formation started in the Preboreal, and that two strong peaks in peat formation occurred in the Boreal/Atlantic and Subboreal/ Subatlantic period. Palaeoecological and archaeological analysis shows the influence of climatic changes and human activities on the peatlands. Human impact is seen in fire, tree cutting and pasturing, and in the construction of dams or digging of basins.

The peat bogs of the Massif Central show great diversity and represent a major natural and archaeological archive. It is advisable to preserve them to be able to further reconstruct the thousand-year-old history of landscape and men.

For more information:

herve.cubizolle@univ-st-etienne.fr

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

See for additional and up-to-date information: <http://www.imcg.net/imcgdia.htm>

### **Knowledge Transfer Workshop on the Canadian approach to peatland restoration**

*3 – 7 October 2005, Québec, Canada*

For more information:

[http://www.gret-perg.ulaval.ca/fr\\_colloques.html](http://www.gret-perg.ulaval.ca/fr_colloques.html)

### **Ramsar Cop 9**

*8 - 15 November 2005, Uganda*

for more information contact [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

IMCG organizes a pre-excursion to peatlands in Uganda, download the excursion programme, see elsewhere in this Newsletter

### **IMCG Field Symposium in Tierra del Fuego**

*21 November to 1 December 2005, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina*

visit <http://www.imcg.s5.com/> and see IMCG Newsletter 2005/1 and 2005/2.

### **Wetlands, Water And Livelihoods Workshop**

*30 January – 2 February 2006, St. Lucia, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

An international workshop exploring best practices and lessons learned in integrating poverty and environment issues.

For more information: <http://www.wetlands.org/news&NewsItems/WWLWorkshop.htm>

### **Land and Water Management for Sustainable Agriculture Scientific Symposium**

*14 – 16 February 2006, Malawi or Lesotho*

For more information: [www.sadc.int](http://www.sadc.int)

### **International Conference on Hydrology and Management of Forested Wetlands**

*8-12 April 2006 New Bern, North Carolina*

for more information visit

<http://www.asae.org/meetings/Forest2006/>

### **IMCG Field Symposium and General assembly in Finland**

*13-26 July 2006, Finland*

for more information take a look at the IMCG website: [www.imcg.net](http://www.imcg.net)

### **5th European Conference on Ecological Restoration**

*22.–25. August 2006, Greifswald, Germany*

See [www.uni-greifswald.de/SER2006](http://www.uni-greifswald.de/SER2006)

### **HydroEco2006**

*11-14 September 2006, Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad), Czech Republic*

International Multidisciplinary Conference on Hydrology and Ecology. For more information visit <http://web.natur.cuni.cz/hydroeco2006/>

### **13th International Peat Congress After Wise Use - The Future of Peatlands**

*9 - 15 June 2008, Tullamore, Ireland*

For more information, surf to [www.peatociety.org](http://www.peatociety.org)

**VISIT THE IMCG HOMEPAGE AT**

**<http://www.imcg.net>**