



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 (Jan Sliva), a Secretary General (Hans Joosten), a Treasurer (Philippe Julve), and 2 additional members (Tatiana Minaeva, Stuart Brooks).

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

Editorial

More than 4 months have gone since the last IMCG Newsletter, a period in which much has taken place. First of all our South Africa / Lesotho meetings and excursions that were instrumental in making us understand the extreme difficulties and challenges in peatland conservation/restoration in developing countries. Piet-Louis and his dedicated crew did a marvellous job. Much of this Newsletter is devoted to the outcomes of South Africa.

This also includes the discussion about a joint internet journal with IPS that we are discussing and preparing since last year. Several members at the General Assembly raised critical questions. Please join the discussions.

Of a completely different character are the "burning issues" in South-East Asia that got a lot of press coverage in the last weeks and for which hopeful actions are now being undertaken. Huge restoration schemes are also implemented in Belarus, Russia, and China. All experiences show that restoration is an expensive and actually impossible job and that adequate land use planning and mire protection is the only cost-effective way to go. In Tierra del Fuego we must therefore protect the wide variety of wild and beautiful mires before they are destroyed. To stimulate that is the aim of our meeting in Ushuaia at the end of November 2005. Read the latest news about that.

As we were not able to include all news in this Newsletter (e.g. our "recent publications" part is a bit meagre this time) we will produce a next Newsletter before the end of 2004. This will enable YOU to participate in the discussions.

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 15 December 2004!

For information or other things, contact us at the IMCG Secretariat. Address updates should be sent to Jan Sliva (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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Contents:

Editorial.....	1
IMCG Congress 2004.....	2
Minutes General Assembly South Africa 2004.....	3
IMCG Resolutions adopted in Paarl, South Africa.....	6
IMCG in Africa – The Song.....	11
News on the IMCG Field Symposium in Tierra del Fuego 2005.....	12
A new international peatland journal?.....	14
3rd Meeting CoCo-GAP.....	17
Peat fires in Indonesia, the facts.....	19
Peat fires in Indonesia, a call for action.....	20
Good news for the Peat swamp Forests of Central Kalimantan, Indonesia.....	21
Peatlands in the news.....	23
International Workshop on Peatland Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use.....	23
Assessment on Peatlands, Biodiversity and Climate change.....	24
World Wetlands Day 2005.....	25
Regional News.....	26
New and recent Journals/Newsletters/Books/Reports.....	32
IMCG Main Board.....	35
UPCOMING EVENTS.....	36

IMCG Congress 2004

by Piet-Louis Grundling

The IMCG hosted its bi-annual Congress “Southern African Mires and Peatlands” from 10–25 September 2004. The series of events included an excursion through South Africa and Lesotho, a scientific symposium with the theme “Management challenges for Wetlands, Mires and Peatlands in the 21st Century” (24 – 25 September 2004 in Paarl, close to Cape Town) and the IMCG General Assembly (26th September 2004 in Paarl).

The Congress was a huge success and I believe it was thoroughly enjoyed by all! Thirtyfive international delegates attended the fieldtrip with 5–10 South Africans joining in daily. The field trip exposed the international delegates to peatlands and mires in the southern African Landscape. I believed that these new environments and mire types have posed certain ecological and academic challenges to our international colleagues. On the other hand we in southern Africa, and especially I myself, have learned a lot from all of you. Certain concepts of peat accumulation were thoroughly discussed on some of the mires we visited. It has opened our eyes and minds to new ideas and concepts. Some of the more important ones that come to mind are to evaluate mires and peatlands in the context of the landscape and the catchment in which they occur, especially

when it comes to management decisions such as restoration and rehabilitation measures.

A more controversial discussion was what is peat and what is gyttja – seems I ended up with some mud on my face! The pristine Watervalvlei mire at Bedford was visited – alas we are losing this beautiful site as ESKOM is in a process of taking over the land from the farmers to flood it for energy purposes.

Other highlights of the tour were the visit to the beautiful Maloti Mountains and mires in Lesotho and the Vankersvelvlei mire in South Africa. At Vankersvel we have seen two species of Sphagnum and augured down to the deepest peat core ever in South Africa – 11.5 m!!

With 55 people, the Symposium was well attended and the presentations were of good quality and well received. Well done to our presenters! I am sure Hans will give more feedback on a lively and fruitful General Assembly!

In closing: Tours like these mean a lot to the countries that host them. We have learned a lot. I trust we will have more of these wonderful knowledge transfer tours between North and South, more developed and less developed regions and countries!!! Long live the IMCG!

The outcomes of the IMCG Southern Africa Congress were directly made available to all participants through a CD, that covered the excursion guide, several crucial background reports, a list of participants and their addresses, the complete powerpoints of presentations of the scientific symposium, an impressive series of digital pictures made available by Olivier Olgiatti, and last but not least the first performances of the song “IMCG in Africa” recorded for a live audience...

For information how to obtain the cd, contact the IMCG secretariat.



Minutes General Assembly South Africa 2004

Minutes of the IMCG General Assembly, 26 September 2004 (08.00–13.00h), Paarl, South Africa

Present: Ab Grootjans, Adriana Urciuolo, Alma Szafnagel-Wolejko, Althea Grundling, Andreas Grünig, Arlette Laplace-Dolonde, Asbjørn Moen, Celine Sacca, Christian Hildebrandt, David H. Kleyn, Francis Muller, Gert Michael Steiner, Hans Esselink, Hans Joosten (IMCG secr.-gen., minutes), Hervé Cubizolle, Izolda Matchutadze, Jaanus Paal, Jutta Zeitz, Leburu Mmaledburu Sophy, Lesław Wolejko (IMCG MB, assembly chairman), Line Rochefort, Mara Pakalne, Matšelis Mphale, Mel Meyer, Michael Heintz, Olivier Olgiati, Pascal Demazière, Piet-Louis Grundling (IMCG MB), Retief Gobler, Rodolfo Iturraspe (IMCG MB), Tapio Lindholm (IMCG MB), Thilivhali Nyambeni, Ulrich Graf

Apologies: Jan Sliva (IMCG chair), Michael Trepel, Philippe Julve (IMCG EC), Stuart Brooks (IMCG EC), Tatjana Minaeva (IMCG EC)

1. **Opening** and Welcome: The chairman opens the meeting at 8.45 hour and presents the agenda.

2. The **Minutes** of the General Assembly of 21 July 2002 in Besançon are unanimously adopted.

3 and 5. The **Biennial report** on the state of affairs in the IMCG and on its policy and the progress in the delivery of the **IMCG Action Plan** were presented by Hans Joosten

Remarks were made on the following issues:

Target A.1. “Assessment of the global distribution and condition of mires and peatlands” with as output a report “The global status of mires and peatlands” (champion Hans Joosten). Joosten informs that the data on countries/region of Africa and Asia are already online available in the IMCG Global Peatland Database (www.imcg.net/gpd/gpd.htm) and that the other countries/regions will follow in the coming months. He calls upon everybody to check the data and send corrections and additions to him.

Target A.2. “Development of a globally valid system of mire types and an overview of their distribution” with as expected output a Report/book “The mire types of the World and their global distribution” also including an overview of global peatland classification (champions Michael Steiner and Jan Sliva). Michael Steiner mentions that since the meetings in Tamsweg (Austria 2001) the project has seen no progress. Jan Sliva had planned to make this theme the subject of his habilitation dissertation but it is unclear what the current progress is. Steiner stresses that still several workshops of regional experts are necessary and envisages 2008 as the earliest year of delivery. He proposes to dedicate half

a day in Ushuaia to the theme. Hans Joosten thinks that such workshops are no adequate instrument and that the responsible champions should take the initiative to compile most material themselves. Furthermore he argues that IMCG can not stay behind in this important issue, where several international conventions pay increasingly attention to peatlands. Also Asbjørn Moen points at the necessity to separate the strategical issue (to present an overview that is useful for interventions in conventions, especially the Convention on Biodiversity) and the scientific challenge to make the “ultimate” overview. Joosten informs that the Convention on Biodiversity has recently adopted the wetland classification of the Ramsar Convention, which is not adequately expressing the ecosystem biodiversity of peatlands and underlines again that “the better should not be the enemy of the good”.

The chairman proposes to discuss the issue further in the Main Board or Executive Committee.

Action A.4.3. “The production of an overview of mire and peatland diversity and conservation status in Europe” with as output the book “Mires and peatlands of Europe” (champion Hans Joosten). Joosten informs that progress has been slow in the last year because of other IMCG priorities. This is unacceptable because this is a central project of IMCG. Therefore Asbjørn Moen has been approached for cooptation in the Main Board with as priority activity to strengthen the Greifswald editing team to bring this project to a successful end. The assembly applauds this step.

Action A.4.4. “The production of an overview of mire and peatland diversity and conservation status in Southern Africa” with as output a book “Mires and peatlands of Southern Africa” (champion Jan Sliva). Joosten informs that Rehana Dada will be assigned to produce a popular-scientific book on the subject on the basis of the material collected for the excursion guide and the observations of the participants of the excursion complemented by general information on mires and peatlands. Basis funding for preparatory work (€ 2000) will be provided from IMCG funds and it will be checked what funds are still available from GPI-Africa. Also John Dini (Working for Wetlands) has offered support. Joosten call upon all participants to support Rehana and send her their observations, ideas, and contributions. Aim should be to have the booklet ready before Ramsar CoP IX (Uganda, November 2005) so that it can function as a contribution of South Africa (and Lesotho) to the delivery of the Ramsar Action Plan for Peatlands.

Action A.4.5. “The production of an overview of mire and peatland diversity and conservation status in Russia” with as output a book “Mires and peatlands of Russia” (champion Tatjana Minaeva). This work will follow the completion of the chapter on Mires in European Russia for the European Mires Book.

Action **A.4.6.** With respect to “Starting the identification of the mire and peatland diversity and conservation status of South America” with as output the book “Mires and peatlands of South America” (champion Rodolfo Iturraspe) the idea is to produce a popular scientific book on the peatlands of Tierra del Fuego, associated with the IMCG Field Symposium 2005. Action **B.1.2.** “The development of an infrastructure for membership expertise exchange”: Ab Grootjans noted that the expertise questionnaire that has been sent to members was deterrent in its complexity (he gave up filling in after 15 minutes) and proposed to simplify it substantially.

Action **C.1.2.** “Continued active participation in relevant Ramsar bodies”: Michael Steiner noted that – although many IMCGers were present there – IMCG was not officially represented at CoP8 in Valencia and stresses that IMCG should be more visible at such meetings. Andreas Grünig notices that Wetlands International is very active and visible with respect to peatlands in Ramsar and that IMCG should put more people in Ramsar and related gremia. With respect to the Ramsar STRP (Scientific and Technical Review Panel) Grünig and Steiner express their concern that the monitoring system for wetlands that is currently developed will not reach quality standards and ask IMCG to give advice to Ramsar how to deal with this issue. They agree to come with background information for the IMCG Newsletter and to conceive a draft letter for the IMCG Executive Committee on the case.

Action **C.1.5.** “Stimulation of mire/peatland related aspects in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto process”: the secretary notes with concern that still no IMCG champion as been identified for this important issue.

Action **C.2.3.** The secretary-general notes that with 56% in 2001 and 38% in 2002 the growth in membership widely exceeds the target of 10 % annually. The growth in number of countries represented stays with 1 severely behind the target of 10 over that period, and requires more attention, also in Southern Africa (C.2.4.).

Action **C.3.3.** “The publication of a scientific journal on peat and peatlands” together with IPS raised considerable discussion under Agenda point 10 (Any other business). Ulrich Graf and others questioned a joint journal of IMCG with IPS because of the different interests of both organisations. Ab Grootjans and others additionally pointed at the fact that a new journal would have no wide readership and no impact factor so that you cannot ask people to submit good manuscripts. Furthermore he asked where sufficient manuscripts should come from. He proposed to stimulate peatland associated publications in already existing journals. Michael Steiner asked for the financial funding of the journal and warned for a too strong cooperation / interdependence of IMCG and IPS.

The assembly decided that a further discussion in the Newsletter is necessary, after which a final decision will be taken by the Main Board.

With respect to action point **C.4.2.** “The stimulation of the development and the use of peat alternatives” the secretary-general informed that since the action point had been published on the IMCG website as being not completed and in need of urgent attention, Michael Trepel had developed a new chapter on the IMCG website devoted to peat alternatives.

Action point **C.5.:** It was proposed to approach Catherine O’Connell (IPCC) to write the booklet “Wise use for children and ministers”.

The review was accepted by the Assembly unanimously without abstentions.

4. Balance sheet and the statement of profit and loss

Because the treasurer Philippe Julve was urgently visiting the hospital, the secretary-general presented and informed on the financial situation of the organisation. Because of a crash of the treasurer’s hard disk, only a preliminary report could be presented. The Assembly accepted the preliminary report with no votes against and 1 abstention, but required a rapid publication of a final report.

6. With respect to the Membership fee, Ulrich Graf proposed starting to raise a membership fee to fund the political work of IMCG, e.g. in the Ramsar Convention. The secretary-general explained the proposal of the Main Board for a continuation of a “zero” membership fee, because the costs of collecting a moderate fee would exceed the revenues. A high fee would deter membership from a lot of people in countries with currency problems. The formal proposal of Piet-Louis Grundling for a “zero”-fee was adopted with 2 votes against.

7. Election of the Main Board:

As there were only 12 candidates for 15 Main Board positions, and in accordance with article 9.1 of the constitution, no voting was necessary and all candidates were included in the new Main Board. The Main Board 2004 – 2006 consists of Olivia Bragg, Stuart Brooks, Piet-Louis Grundling, Rodolfo Iturraspe, Hans Joosten, Philippe Julve, Elena Lapshina, Tatiana Minaeva, Jan Sliva, Jennie Whinam, Lesław Wolejko, and Meng Xianmin. The secretary-general informed on the outcome of preliminary discussions among the Main Board members present in South Africa on possible candidates for the positions in the Executive Committee and on proposals for cooptation of an additional three Main Board members.

8. The Conference resolutions were projected on the wall, read aloud, and discussed.

The draft resolution for *Germany* was slightly amended (removal of the words “fascist” and “Benz” from the draft text) and adopted with 0 votes against and 1 abstention.

The draft resolution for *Czechia* was slightly amended (“agriculturalist” changed for “farmer”,

reasonable” for “responsible”, “virgin” for “pristine”, shorter sentences) and adopted with 0 votes against and 0 abstentions.

The draft resolution for *Poland* was slightly amended (“water relations” changed for “water conditions”, “as far away as possible from” for “far enough that it does not affect”) and adopted with 0 votes against and 0 abstentions.

The draft resolution for *China* was slightly amended (the sentence “The majority of wetlands of the World consists of peatlands, i.e. lands covered with a layer of peat” was skippep, “peat sequestering” was changed into “peat accumulating”) and adopted with 0 votes against and 0 abstentions.

The draft resolution for *Estonia* was withdrawn.

The draft resolution for *Latvia* was slightly amended (“regeneration” changed for “restoration”, “a Latvian Mire Research Station, where are carried out” skipped) and adopted with 0 votes against and 0 abstentions.

The draft resolution for the *European Union*, the *United Nations*, and the *Global Environmental Facility* was discussed and clarified, and adopted with 0 votes against and 1 abstention.

The draft resolution for *South Africa* raised discussions with respect to the formulation of the position towards the developments at Braamhoek (Watervalvlei). The draft formulation of “acceptance” of the decision was by the Assembly changed into a position of “regret, but if, then mitigation”. The rephrased resolution was adopted with 14 votes in favour, 6 against, and 3 abstentions.

The draft resolution for *Austria* was adopted with 0 votes against and 0 abstentions.

9. Next venues:

Tapio Lindholm presented an invitation to and the plans for the 2006 biannual IMCG Field Symposium in Finland that will focus on the evaluation of mire conservation in Finland.

Rodolfo Iturraspe and Adriana Urciuolo displayed their plans for the 2005 IMCG Field Symposium in Tierra del Fuego (Argentina). It was agreed to organize the meeting in November 2005 to not interfere too strongly with the 2006 Finland meeting. The exact dates should be coordinated with the dates of the Ramsar Conference of Parties 2005 in Kampala (Uganda).

With respect to the 2008 meeting, Mara Pakalne informed that in June 2008 a final workshop will take place of her new EU project; Line Rochefort informed that the conference “The Biology of Sphagnum” will take in that year in Canada and USA with an excursion from Vancouver up to the Yukon. Ideas on a possible venue for the IMCG 2008 events were exchanged but no decision taken. The Assembly delegated that decision to the EC and MB and asked to come with a final decision within half a year.

10. Under Any Other Business Francis Muller informed that a review of the results of the resolution for France as adopted in France 2002 will be prepared for the IMCG Newsletter and website. Furthermore the request was raised to put a selection of fotos of the South Africa event on the IMCG website, as well as the text of the “IMCG in Africa” song.

At 13.00 hours the chairman closes the meeting.

Membership Fees and Donations

On our General Assembly in South Africa we again decided to keep the IMCG membership free of charge, because the costs of collecting low membership fees would exceed the fees themselves and high membership fees would chase off a large part of the IMCG membership in countries with currency problems. Some members rightfully acknowledged that IMCG needs money for its increasing activities. The solution for this dilemma is simple: why not donate a substantial amount of money to IMCG if you have the money available and you want to support IMCG also financially. Contact the treasurer to discuss the best option for you (e.g. for having optimal fiscal advantages): philippe.julve@wanadoo.fr

IMCG Resolutions adopted in Paarl, South Africa

During the IMCG General Assembly in Paarl, South Africa, a total of 8 IMCG resolutions were adopted (see minutes General Assembly, elsewhere in this Newsletter). Below are the four resolutions that have

not yet been published in the Newsletter. All resolutions will also be put on the IMCG website.

IMCG Resolution for Latvia

The International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) is a worldwide organisation of mire (peatland) specialists who have a particular interest in the conservation of peatland habitats. The IMCG willingly places its advice and expertise at the disposal of any government seeking to establish or maintain mire conservation programmes.

The IMCG held its 11th biennial General Assembly in Paarl, South Africa in September 2004. At that Assembly the following resolution was adopted with respect to the current provision for conservation of mires in Latvia.

We appreciate the ongoing activities to protect the mires of Latvia in the face of increasing pressure for their utilization in the whole Baltic region. The 8th field symposium and General Assembly of the IMCG was held in Latvia in 1998, and we had the pleasure of visiting many Latvian mire sites. In 2003, the Mire Habitat Management Plan was prepared that provides an overview on Latvian mires, their values, and the management actions necessary for their conservation.

Currently 5 projects under the European Commission financed LIFE-Nature programme include actions related to mire conservation and management. These projects include the restoration of raised bog hydrology with which Latvia can develop expertise and methodology in the restoration of raised bog ecosystems. We welcome the fact that the Ministry of Environment of Latvia supports these projects and trust that this support will continue.

However, the international mire conservation community notes the following additional needs to ensure the conservation of mire biodiversity:

1. Latvia still lacks an up-to-date peatland inventory. The existing nation-wide peat survey urgently needs revision because its scale is too coarse for peatland conservation purposes. The revision must include information on the biodiversity values, the hydrology, and the geology of peatlands in Latvia.
2. Last year the Latvian Environmental Monitoring Programme has started that includes the monitoring of flora, fauna and vegetation of raised bogs and fens. There is, however, a clear need for additional hydrological and meteorological studies.
3. Regular funding should be provided for management planning of protected mire sites. Administrative capacity should be raised to implement management measures.
4. Awareness of the value of mires should be improved in schools and universities as well as in society.

IMCG Resolution for China

The International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) is a worldwide organisation of mire (peatland) specialists who have a particular interest in the conservation of peatland habitats. In its 11th Biennial General Assembly meeting in Paarl (South Africa, September, 26, 2004) the following resolution was adopted.

The Chinese Ramsar Convention Implementation Office (State Forestry Administration), jointly working with the National Commission of Development and Reform, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Land Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Construction, the State Environment Protection Administration, and the State Oceanic Administration has recently adopted an ambitious National Wetland Conservation Programme for China for the period 2002-2030. Targets for the near future (before 2010) include

- The stopping of wetland degradation;
- The effective conservation of key wetlands;
- The development of facilities/institutions for 225 wetland reserves, including designation of 30 new Ramsar sites;
- The restoration of at least 1.1 million ha degraded wetlands;
- The development of pilot demonstration sites for wise use of wetlands in 23 sites;
- The development of a national facilitation mechanism and management system (including monitoring, communication, education, and public awareness) for wetlands.

Peatlands in China are highly threatened ecosystems. Major concentrations of peatlands are found in Northeast China (Dongbei) and on the Tibetan plateau. In these areas the large majority of peatlands is used for arable agriculture respectively intensive grazing. Recent estimates indicate that possibly less than 25 % of the original area of peatlands in China has remained as undisturbed, actively peat accumulating wetlands (mires). Large areas of drained peatlands in agricultural use have lost their important natural functions for long-term Carbon storage, regional water regulation, and biodiversity conservation, and are currently subject to severe peat oxidation and erosion.

The International Mire Conservation Group urges the central Government of China and the provincial administrations, following the National Wetland Conservation Programme and Ramsar CoP8 Resolution VIII.17,

- To urgently make an inventory of undrained and still actively peat sequestering peatland sites in China;
- To immediately and effectively protect these peatlands (incl. their hydrological catchment areas) as national nature reserves;
- To designate the main of these peatlands as Ramsar sites, as Chinese peatlands are severely under-represented in the List of Wetlands of International Importance;
- To restore the least degraded peatlands (i.e. recently drained sites with limited vegetation modification and peat soil degradation) to peat accumulating ecosystems without delay in order to restore their environmental regulation and biodiversity functions as long as restoration is still easily possible;
- To develop and implement wise use management systems for peatlands in agricultural use, including the development of pilot demonstration sites;
- To restore cut-over peatlands after peat extraction to new peat accumulating sites;
- To improve awareness and understanding of peatlands functions and values by including peatlands as a theme in national or regional action plans for education and public awareness;
- To review and ensure the necessary institutional capacity for these activities by improving access to information and training facilities;
- To stimulate and support scientific research in peatland conservation, management, and wise use by the instalment of Regional Centres of Peatland Expertise and the establishment of networks for research and programme cooperation to share knowledge and information and improve understanding of the biodiversity, ecological character, values, and functions of China's peatlands;
- To encourage international cooperation on research and technology transfer for peatland conservation and wise use.

The International Mire Conservation Group will be pleased to assist in these important tasks by contributing its expertise and providing training facilities in peatland ecology, conservation, management, and wise use (e.g. to the Mire and Peat Institute of the Northeast Normal University in Changchun) and to support community participation, education, and public awareness raising.

IMCG Resolution for South Africa

The International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) is a worldwide organisation of mire (peatland) specialists who have a particular interest in the conservation of peatland habitats. The IMCG willingly places its advice and expertise at the disposal of any government seeking to establish or maintain mire conservation programmes.

The IMCG held its 11th biennial General Assembly in Paarl, South Africa, in September 2004. At that Assembly the following resolution was adopted with respect to the current provision for mire conservation in South Africa.

The IMCG notes with approval the developments in South Africa since the IMCG adopted the first resolution on South African peatlands (Quebec, August 2000):

- The listing of peat mining as a schedule 2 activity in the new proposed Integrated Environmental Management (IEM) legislation
- The revision of wetland related policies in the proposed Sustainable Utilisation of Agricultural Resources policy
- The recent progress in developing methodology for a South African wetland inventory within the National Land Cover 2000 Project. This project that is executed by various departments will contribute substantially to the mire conservation objectives formulated by the Ramsar and Biodiversity Conventions.
- The laudable activities of the National Land Care initiative in the conservation and improvement of catchments thereby contributing to the wise use of wetlands and mires.
- The impressive actions of the Working for Wetlands partnership (DEAT, Department of Agriculture, Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, South African National Biodiversity Institute, Working for Water Programme and the Mondi Wetland Project). The Working for Wetlands programme is setting an international example in establishing wetland awareness and poverty reduction by rehabilitating and restoring peatlands and wetlands.

However, IMCG notes that there are 5 problems related to the protection of mires that require urgent attention:

1. South Africa still does not have an up-to-date national policy on peat utilisation. This situation, although peat mining is now a listed activity in the new proposed IEM legislation, leads to inefficiency in:

- the enforcing of legislation and policy,
- the monitoring of impacts and exploitation, as well as
- the co-ordination of involved departments on all levels of government, especially as the Peat Working Group is not a formal recognised government committee.

We therefore urge the South African government to ensure:

- a full strategic environmental audit of peatlands in the country, including
- a national peatland inventory
- an inventory of the industrial, horticultural and subsistence utilisation of peat and peatlands, including the costs and benefits of these forms of utilisation
- a re-evaluation of relevant legislation.
- the development of effective governance mechanisms across all three spheres of government

2. Various horticulture related industries utilise peat. The recently increased demand for peat in the mushroom growing industry, by the potting soil sector and for golf estate developments, as well as the proposed extraction of organic fertilizer from peat incite the mining of peat from South African peatlands and constitute a threat for the important environmental and biodiversity functions of these ecosystems.

Alternatives to peat, such as recycled processed wattle barks, do exist but further research is needed to ensure a viable transition to these alternative products.

We therefore urge the South African government to encourage the use of alternative products and to support research into these.

3. Coastal Peatland Swamp Forest (CPSF) is the rarest wetland type in South Africa. The uncontrolled draining and destruction of these forests for commercial as well as subsistence farming in and directly adjacent to the Greater St Lucia World Heritage site (including 4 Ramsar sites) are reason for large concern as these sites are irreversibly damaged. The uncontrolled expansion of forestry via small woodlots sponsored by the forestry industry are further negatively impacting the hydrology of the peatlands in this region.

We do recognise that local communities depend on these ecosystems for agriculture, fibre, medicine and good quality water. However, the continued damage to the CPSF's will not only destroy the ecosystem and its biodiversity but also the subsistence base of the communities depending on them.

We recognise the efforts of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Authorities and the KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife Services in dealing with this matter but call on the South African Government to encourage and implement comprehensive wise use practices and alternatives within the communities depending on the CPSF's and other mire and wetland ecosystems.

4. We do regret the decision regarding Braamhoek, because part of a mire will be destroyed of which the international importance became again manifest during our field visit of the site. (cf. resolution France). We request the South African government to ensure that the required mitigation measures as stipulated in the Record of Decision are met to the satisfaction of the environmental authorities and organisations involved.

We further urge effective implementation of mitigatory measures to ensure that the integrity of the remainder of the peatland downstream of the proposed wall is not compromised. Impacts on the wetland as a whole should also be minimised during the construction phase including supporting infrastructure.

5. We have learned that the Lesotho Highlands and adjacent catchments in South Africa provide at present 40 % of the water resources in this part of southern Africa and that it will rise to 70 % in the foreseeable future. It is thus with concern that we observed the level of degradation in mires and other wetlands in Lesotho and adjacent catchments in South Africa.

These mires and wetlands are also important in terms of biodiversity and life support to local communities and we therefore request the South African Government together with its Lesotho counterparts to rehabilitate, conserve and encourage wise use of these systems in the spirit of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Initiatives such as the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Park are crucial but areas outside this park need also to be prioritised such as in the catchment of the Katse Dam and the proposed Mohale dam in Lesotho.

Peatlands, like most wetlands, are under severe pressure internationally and urgently require additional protection (cf. Ramsar Resolution 8-17). The IMCG is willing to make its expertise available to the South African government to assist in these matters.

IMCG Resolution for the European Union, the United Nations, and the Global Environmental Facility

The International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) is a worldwide organisation of mire (peatland) specialists who have a particular interest in the conservation of peatland habitats. In its 11th Biennial General Assembly meeting in Paarl (South Africa, September, 26, 2004) the following resolution was adopted.

The rising levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are changing the climate. The problem is caused by the mobilisation of long-term stored Carbon through the burning of fossil fuels and the destruction/reduction of the Earth's biomass (forests). To reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, society aims at replacing fossil fuels with renewable alternatives.

The IMCG has noted with concern that peat is being increasingly promoted as a renewable fuel. This has already resulted in

- the European Union directive 2003/96/EC excluding "peat" from the hydrocarbons that have to be taxed for energy production
- Finland and Sweden classifying peat as a "slowly renewable biomass fuel" with associated tax reductions and "green certificates"
- The Russian Federation in its National Energy Strategy that promotes the replacement of oil and gas by biomass, including peat in its biomass concept
- The Russian Ministry of Economy and Trade applying for a grant of over 20 million US\$ from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) focal area Climate Change to fund its "Renewable Energy Program (RREP)" in which peat is presented as a renewable resource.

These claims of renewability lack a scientific foundation and are based on suggestive use of terms and false arguments.

With terms like “biomass fuel” (biofuel, biological fuel) the peat lobby aims to verbally disconnect peat from other fossil fuels and associate it with short rotation energy crops like straw and reeds. The prefix “bio-” means “associated with life.” Indeed peat is “associated with life” as it stems from living organisms. But all carbon-based fossil fuels are “associated with life” in that sense. In science, biomass is defined as the mass of living (bios = life) organisms or “living weight” (Odum 1971). Fuel peat is no biomass, as the peat is generally derived from plants that died thousands of years ago.

Another suggestive claim is the renewability of peat. Indeed is peat renewable: it is still being formed at present, like it has been formed since hundreds of millions of years. But this does not distinguish peat from other fossil fuels, as also lignite and coal deposits are still formed today.

Not the renewability (i.e. the fact that they can renew) is relevant from a climate point of view but the rate of renewal (i.e. the time period required for their formation). Burning coal means releasing carbon that has not been part of the atmo- and biosphere for millions of years. Peat burned for fuel is thousands of years old. For coal and peat the rate of renewal is so small that their renewability is irrelevant for society. Renewable with respect to the greenhouse effect means the use of energy sources that replenish as quickly as they are used up (= short rotation).

Furthermore, the fact that a type of fuel is renewable does not mean that it is actually renewed. If the fuel is not given opportunity to renew, the use of a “renewable” fuel contributes as much to the greenhouse effect as any non-renewable fuel.

Erroneously it is often claimed that after a peatland has been exploited, peat accumulation will re-start and greenhouse gases will be stored again. This may indeed be the case but the rates involved are only a fraction of those emitted by burning thick layers of peat.

The most common argument used to defend the renewability of peat fuel is that less peat is extracted than is annually accumulating. This argument is false for a range of reasons:

- In almost all countries of Europe, in the whole of Europe, and over the whole Earth more peat is disappearing than is being formed. Next to the actual extraction of peat, enormous losses occur in agricultural, forested, and cutover peatlands. In claiming renewability of fuel peat, all of the gains (all peat accumulation in a country or a region) are falsely balanced with only part of the losses (only from peat extraction).
- Much peat accumulating “elsewhere” is not available for exploitation, because of technical or conservational reasons. Peat that is not available is no “resource” and may not be used for balancing losses through peat combustion.
- Peat extraction is not only consuming peat but also destroying the peat accumulating ecosystems. Unless peat is actively regenerating on the cutover sites, the resource will eventually be depleted. And that is the current situation on Earth. The area of cutover bogs that has been restored to peat accumulating ecosystems is negligible and stands in no proportion to the area degraded by peat extraction.
- The peatlands whose CO₂ sequestration is claimed for balancing CO₂ emissions from peat combustion were already part of the greenhouse balance long before the anthropogenic rise of atmospheric CO₂-levels. They were and are part of the natural sink system that compensates natural sources. These natural sources include the methane (CH₄) emissions from natural peatlands.
- Peat extraction and combustion creates an extra source of greenhouse gases. To be greenhouse neutral, additional sources require additional sinks. Peat extraction is mobilising new carbon sources without creating such new sinks. Also in this respect, burning peat does not differ from burning coal.

Peat combustion is not a climate neutral activity. There may be honest reasons to locally – and with due observation of the many other values of peatlands -, use peat for fuel, but these reasons do not include renewability.

International conventions increasingly acknowledge the globally important carbon storage and sequestration function of peatlands (Ramsar Convention November 2002, Convention on Biodiversity February 2004). We urge the bodies addressed to correct the contradictions and to prevent an expansion of peat combustion for its “renewability”.

IMCG in Africa – The Song

by Hans Joosten

Francis we met in Madrid
Where he joined Jutta and me
And so we flew to Africa
We were already three
Johannisburg, the airport
We are looking for the bus
And for the man or woman
Who should be waiting there for us
We waited two, three hours:
There are Leszjek and his wife
IMCG is growing
We are already five

Chorus:

Just give me peat and water
And an auger in my hand
IMCG in Africa
Everyday a new peatland

The first site was in Rietvlei
With sewage and rhinos
And cheetahs in the darkness
And buffalos so close
We drove around in darkness
It was terrific cold
Was this tropical Africa
With sunshine burning gold?
But later it was warmer
With a nice and central fire
With local foods and drinks
And with a flavour of desire

Chorus

Through Mpumalanga Province
To the Verloren Vlei
It was early in the morning
Maar ieder was erbij
Then further to Kwazulu
Where the bus stuck in the sand
Some extra work for Pine
And for us a swamp peatland
Sisyrinchium cordatum
With sugar cane and yam
Bananas in the naked peat
Ik schrok me bijna lam

Chorus

The peat proved to be sediment
The hippos did not mind
They floated in the water
There were many of that kind
For wellingtons and rubbers

And nokias and boots
Proved all to be too short
We go back towards our roots
To live like a real hippo
Became our only aim
Christian, Pascal, Rehana
Were thinking all the same

Chorus

There were not much
mosquitoes
That was a big relief
So without fear or fever
We could listen to Retief
Who told of his research and
Who showed us every plant
Who even knew the species
names
A unicum in this land
And every evening programme
With speakers or a show
With songs and Okavango
Nen braai, a bath or so

Chorus

Not everything went smoothly
And many became sick
With coughing, headaches,
vomiting
And throats that were too thick
And like a mobile hospital
We drove through whole the
land
With doctor, nurse Rehana
Continuously at hand
That made the suffering bearable
And sickness became fun
When she gave you the medicin
And smiled just like the sun
Chorus

Yes, mountain air is healthy
That is what we all know
So we headed from the lowlands
To the Kingdom Lesotho
With mountain fens, erosion,
The capital and king
The mountain that defends us
Come Tsedi, dance and sing
And leaving warm Lesotho
Was difficult and cold
So we gathered like a herd
To cuddle and to hold

Chorus

The last part of the journey
With finally Palmiet
Proved the ideal niche and
habitat
For our great leader Piet
His energy, devotion,
His body and his mass
He threw in the green jungle
The towering wall of grass
And with a cry that frightened
The birds and all the game
We again discovered peat, or
gyttja:
It is all the same



Chorus

This is not the end
For we must continue
New peatlands are waiting
For the help of us all
But this African travel
I will always remember
I will carry it with me
Till the curtains fall
I will carry it with me
Till the curtains fall.

News on the IMCG Field Symposium in Tierra del Fuego 2005

by Rodolfo Iturrapse

The preparation of the IMCG Field Symposium in Tierra del Fuego (Argentina) is proceeding properly. The Symposium will be organized in collaboration with the Direction of Water Resources, Sub-Secretary of Natural Resources, Tierra del Fuego Province, Argentina and the Centro Austral de Investigaciones Científicas - CADIC -CONICET, Ushuaia, Argentina.

In contrast to what we had announced in the IMCG Newsletter 2004-1 (March 2004), we have rescheduled the whole event to the period November 21 until December 1, 2005. This will enable IMCG members who have to participate in the Ramsar Conference of Parties in Kampala (Uganda) to also join the meeting in Tierra del Fuego.

The symposium aims to stimulate mire conservation in Tierra del Fuego, South America, and the extratropical Southern Hemisphere and will enable mire conservationists and administrators from Tierra del Fuego to discuss topical issues with respect to mire conservation and wise use with IMCG members from other parts of the world.

Programme

The Field Symposium will consist of seven days of excursions all around Tierra del Fuego followed by three days of symposia and workshops in Ushuaia (with English as conversation language). The preliminary programme looks as follows (see for descriptions of the excursion sites IMCG Newsletter 2004-1):

Day	Calendar day	Activity	Accommodation
1	21/11	Registration, reception, general introductions	Ushuaia
2	22/11	Andorra mire	Ushuaia
3	23/11	Ushuaia urban mires – Peninsula Mitre overfly (morning) - Martial glacier valley area.	Ushuaia
4	24/11	Tierra del Fuego National Park - Tierra Mayor mires	Tolhuin
5	25/11	Lagoa Fagnano Area mires	Tolhuin
6	26/11	Reserva Corazón Carex mires – Río Grande vegas	Lago Escondido.
7	27/11	Harberton and Moat.	Ea Harberton (not confirmed)
8	28/11	Moat expedition.	Ushuaia
9	29/11	Congress: Presentations	Ushuaia
10	30/11	Congress: Presentations	Ushuaia
11	01/12	Congress conclusions (morning)	Ushuaia

Registration Costs

Registration	Fees (Euros)	
	Before 15-may 2005	After 15-may 2005
Scientific sessions only (*)	220	260
Full Package (**)	750	830

(*) Option for participants interested in the three day scientific sessions only. This registration fee includes: admission to the sessions and related activities, coffee breaks, Extended Abstract Book, and meals (29 –30 Nov). Accommodation is not included.

(**) Option for participants interested in the Field Excursion and the Scientific Sessions. This fee includes the same items as (*) and additionally: transfer from the airport 21 Nov, accommodation from 21 Nov (noon) to 1 Dec (noon), transport during the field excursion, meals, snacks and breakfast from 21 Nov night to 1 Dec morning.

Reduced registration fees are offered for early registration before 15 May 2005. Early registration is

only available to professional participants who are able to actively contribute to the Symposium objectives. Accompanying persons are welcome to register after 15-May depending on the availability. The number of participants for the Field excursion is limited to 50. Professional participants will thus receive first preference.

Special fees will be available on request for participants (in a limited number) from countries with currency problems.

Climate

In Southern Tierra del Fuego (Ushuaia) the climate is humid and moderate by the oceanic influence. The mean annual temperature is 5.5 °C. Rains are frequent all over the year (10 - 14 rainy days/month) but it only rains a few mm/day. The monthly average rainfall for November is about 42 mm. To the North of the Island it is a little more dry, sunny and windy. The mean air temperatures (°C) in Ushuaia are

Month	Mean	Mean-Max	Mean-Min
November	7.4	12	3.6
December	8.8	13.5	4.9

Pre- registration

We need early information about possible participants. If you are interested to attend this Symposium please send an e-mail to **imcg2005@yahoo.com** with the following data:

status and title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr.)

name:

e-mail address:

postal address:

phone:

fax:

organization:

Do you want to make a presentation?

Comments:

Call for extended abstracts

You are cordially invited to share your experiences and expertise with other specialists by sending an extended abstract about your presentation. Suggested Topics:

Mire and peatland inventory

Mire ecology

Mire and peatland hydrology

Mire conservation and restoration

Wise use of Mires and peatlands – Mire management.

Extended abstracts should be submitted as soon as possible. The deadline for extended abstract submission is 1 April 2005

Send your extended abstract to:

imcg2005@yahoo.com or
iturraspe@tdfuego.com

Extended Abstract format:

Microsoft Word file - A4 Page Size -

left , right , top and bottom margins: 2.5 cm.

Max. extension: two pages.

TITLE: CENTERED, TIMES NEW ROMAN 12 BOLD.

Authors: Names and last Name(1): Times New Roman 11 bold.

(1) Author references: Organization Name , City, Country , E-mail. Times New Roman 9.

(In case of more than two authors, write only the first author references.)

ABSTRACT

Main section Titles in Times New Roman 11 bold.: Abstract Text: Times New Roman 10 – Max 200 words.

First lines of paragraphs are indented 1 cm.

Further Sections to the author's needs.

Normal text font: Times New Roman 11. Tables and Figures centered, with titles and notes in Times New Roman 10 at the bottom.

REFERENCES

The font for references is Times New Roman 10. Use only a minimum number of strictly necessary references. Use this format:

Author, B.P., Author 2, L.T., Author 3, A.B and Author 4, C.D. 2002. The Article Title. The Journal Name, 18, 125-133.

A new international peatland journal?

As you could already read in the IMCG Newsletter of December 2003, the International Peat Society (IPS) and the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) are investigating the possibilities to establish a peer-reviewed Internet journal focusing specifically on mires, peatlands, and peat. A new Journal with a new name (the current favourite is *Mires and Peat – The International Journal of Peatland Research*) that is truly “free-to-users” with NO subscriptions and NO publication charges, so that it will be immediately accessible to authors and subscribers worldwide. In the past months much progress has been made in preparing the technicalities of such a journal.

Discussion

The IPS Executive Board has in its meeting of November 2004 agreed with the initiative and has allocated funds for the journal. Also the IMCG Board had expressed its positive attitude towards the Journal. On the IMCG General Assembly in Paarl (South Africa), however, some IMCG members raised doubts and it was agreed to discuss the issue further in the IMCG Newsletter. This article wants to give some general information on how the Journal is currently envisaged. Elsewhere in this Newsletter you will find discussion contributions on the journal. We will also offer room for exchange of ideas in the next IMCG Newsletter of December 2004 (please send your contributions to the IMCG Secretariat), after which the IMCG Main Board will take a final decision whether or not to proceed with a joined Journal with IPS.

Scope

The Journal plans to publish high-quality scientific papers on all aspects of peatland science, technology and wise use, including:

- (palaeo)ecology, hydrology, geology, distribution, and status of mires and peatlands;
- biological, physical, and chemical characteristics of peat;
- technological, socio-economic, cultural, and ethical aspects of peatland conservation, use, and management
- climate change and peatlands.

Short communications, review articles, and book reviews on these and related topics will also be considered; and suggestions for special issues of the Journal based on the proceedings of conferences, seminars, symposia, and workshops will be welcomed. The submission of material by authors and from countries whose work would otherwise be inaccessible to the international community is particularly encouraged.

Editorial board

A new high quality editorial board will be installed. Olivia Bragg (IMCG) will be editor-in chief, whereas Jack Rieley (IPS) will assist her as co-editor. Papers must be written in English. Papers should not, as a rule, exceed 6,000 words or 20 printed pages, including Figures and Tables. Papers exceeding this limit should be discussed with the Editor. Each article will be reviewed by at least two referees.

Mires and Peat will be published jointly by the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) and the International Peat Society (IPS, whose International Peat Journal ceased publication with Issue No. 12 in June 2004).

If you have any comments or suggestions please contact Olivia Bragg under o.m.bragg@dundee.ac.uk, copying to olivia4@uel.ac.uk.

Does IMCG need a Scientific Peat Journal?

During the General Assembly in Paarl, South Africa I heard for the first time that there were plans to launch a new scientific journal with a focus on peat and mires. It would be an on-line journal, freely available and would be a fine scientific basis for both IMCG and IPS membership. Two well-known scientists from IPS/IMCG would be editors of the new journal. Which IMCG members could possibly object to such an initiative? Well, at the meeting in Paarl several members of the IMCG did express doubts. And I, being one of them, will try to put this criticism into perspectives.

The positive side of a new on-line non-commercial journal is of course that it can publish articles quickly and cheaply. The new journal might also contribute

to a better concentration of scientific work on mires, ecohydrology, mire conservation, and peat use, thus preventing articles on mires and peat to be spread very thinly over very many journals. Another obvious advantage is that the journal could assist in getting articles published that most other journals would reject, not because they are bad, but because they do not fit the scope of the journal, they are too descriptive, or that the editor/reviewer does not like peat or mires.

The negative side of a new journal is that it has to prove itself in order to get an ISI citation index (you get a high score if your article is cited by many other articles). This horrible way of evaluating scientific production is gaining momentum in most of the

established scientific community. Not only “established” scientists feel the heat of ‘publish or perish’, but especially young scientists have to prove themselves, by publishing in ISI-journals. Encouraging people to publish in a journal that has not yet proved itself and that might take 1-5 years to get ISI accreditation (or will never reach that stage), is not in the interest of many mire scientists. I would like to point at the fate of the Journal of Coastal Conservation (JCC). Everyone involved in Coastal Conservation thought that there would be enough interest in Coastal Conservation in Europe to start a new journal, although another America based journal on Coastal Research already existed. After almost 10 years, no ISI accreditation is in sight, appearance is irregular and the flow of submitted articles stays far behind expectation. I must admit that Applied Vegetation Science did much better and will have an ISI index after about 5-6 years. I am sure that more successful journals can be mentioned, but the crucial question is: can IMCG and IPS together make a flying start and keep momentum in this struggle for survival? I doubt that very much. The IPS journal IPJ (International Peat Journal) has a bad record of appearing. Another peat journal Telma is appearing regularly, but only once a year, and IMCG is very busy with publishing books (which I think is a very efficient way of spreading information on mires). So where will the articles come from? I suppose that a new peat journal will attract interest from the following sources: a) descriptive studies on mires that have little chance of appearing in ISI journals, b) newcomers in peat science that have not yet much experience in writing papers, c) rejected papers from other journals, d) good papers from mire scientist that help to make a flying start, e) discussion papers on specific mire and peat issues. This mix will not gain ISI accreditation soon, which will lead to much disappointment and ‘sacrificing good papers’ for a noble cause. I doubt if many mire scientists will act against their own interest.

I think there is a good alternative that will be much more positive and less risky. There is a saying: if you cannot beat them, join them. At least two journals exist that compete for the same type of articles: Wetlands and Restoration Ecology (mainly America based journals). Both have rather low SI-indices. Both are aiming for a more international readership. I am sure other journals are in a similar situation. I suggest that the IMCG offers help to existing journals to change their focus a bit towards mires and select good mire papers to be published in existing SI-Journals. You could still operate an on-line editing facility that helps to prepare concept articles, publishes descriptive work on mires only to make it available for others, or show concept chapters for IMCG books on mires before they are officially published (as was done with the wise-use guide). The journal Wetlands has a broad base in the Society of Wetland Scientists and Restoration Ecology has an even larger organisation Society of Ecological Restoration to back up their journal. IMCG is

“scientifically” rather small, and IPS is a dwarf compared to SER and SWS. So joining forces with established journals is a better way to improve mire science because there is hardly any risk of failure. Here we can offer assistance that is not a sacrifice. I would be more than willing to join such an operation, but don’t ask me to step in a risky enterprise that could potentially harm the careers of good mire scientists and in the end only offers IPS a scientific justification for peat ‘harvesting’ that it does not deserve.

Ab Grootjans
University of Groningen, NL

Olivia’s response to Ab follows:

Ab has indeed spotted some of the advantages of an on-line journal on mires and peat, namely:

- the format means that articles can be published quickly and cheaply;
- it gathers scientific work that is relevant to IMCG members in one place; and
- it will publish good mire science that is not appropriate for any other journal.

The rest is about ISI citation indices. Yes, the intention is to try to secure one of these for the new journal, and I’m disappointed that Ab sees the situation so negatively. I prefer to take a positive attitude. Some of the criteria set by ISI relate to editorial standards, which I intend to maintain (hopefully with the help of a good Editorial Board). The rest are concerned with achieving “critical mass” – essentially a healthy flow of articles indicating that the journal focuses on an emerging research topic that is not already covered within the ISI database. So is mire science ready to go for critical mass? Is our own assessment that, despite recent achievements in moving mires forward in the policy arena, the supporting research is just not good or active enough to stand up to this type of scrutiny? Or could this be another “underweight fight” where IMCG just might manage to come out on top?

In this respect, one advantage that we do have over other journals starting from scratch is the prospect of being able to operate without subscription charges. A journal that can be readily identified by web searches and then turns out to be freely available throughout the world might well be expected to have a head start in the citation stakes. A second advantage, worth many ISI points and not shared by the other peat-focused journals Telma and Suo, is the potential for IMCG and IPS members to form the core of an eminent, international authorship and Editorial Board, that is nonetheless capable of publishing all its material in English.

But let’s suppose that Ab is correct, and that however hard we try, the citation index will not materialise. Couldn’t the proposed journal be a worthwhile addition to IMCG’s activities in any case? Perhaps we have made a start to demonstrating this with Issue

12 of the International Peat Journal, which includes the small and diverse collection of publishable papers that came out of our symposium in Japan that would otherwise never have been published at all. With the internet journal infrastructure in place, we shall be ready to publish papers from our symposia in Tampere and South Africa as soon as they emerge from the refereeing process – there will be no need to wait for late papers to arrive, no need to seek funds for printing and distribution, no need for guesswork on print runs, and yet virtually no limitation on availability to a worldwide audience. Add the good mire papers that come from obscure countries and in bad English (which we can improve), those that Ab acknowledges would be rejected by other journals for scope reasons, and the internationally important mire science that now gets hidden away in small national journals (I have reviewed two such papers in the last couple of months), and I think we already have a powerful tool for IMCG's information-disseminating objectives as well as a respectable outlet for mire scientists who need to build up basic portfolios of peer-reviewed publications. There are individual performance points to be had for publications in non-ISI journals (otherwise, how could these exist?), and perhaps with a few of Ab's "sacrifices" we might not need to endure this low status forever.

I see no potential benefit from Ab's suggestion that we should devote IMCG effort to raising the profiles of giant journals like *Wetlands* and *Restoration Ecology*. We can all publish in these individually if we wish. On the basis of a quick look at the recent contents of *Wetlands* (<http://www.sws.org/wetlands/journalsearch.html>), I think that I would personally avoid this option because my mire papers would be just as insignificant amongst this US-biased collection of articles on all watery habitats as they are in the selection of higher-impact hydrological and ecological journals that have published my work already. *Restoration Ecology* is likely to be even more "dilute" and inaccessible for peatland researchers, since its scope includes terrestrial, marine and freshwater systems and it costs 233 euro per year for a personal subscription (or \$ 107 when being a member of the Society of Ecological restoration).

By effectively "joining forces" instead with the International Peat Journal (IPJ), we shall have an opportunity to make a completely new publication in which every paper will be about mires, peatlands or peat; and at the same time to benefit from the modest but long reputation of IPJ. We shall be able to influence editorial policy much more than would be possible with one of the established wetlands journals. I have absolutely no worries about this so far because at the meeting I attended in Amsterdam last weekend, the IPS Executive Committee fully endorsed my view that we were aiming to produce a scientific journal and definitely not any kind of propaganda vehicle. This is not a "risky" venture for IMCG in financial terms, since IPS is prepared initially to contribute most of the real money. The

risk that we shall be launching a completely empty web page at the beginning of 2005 also seems fairly remote because, even without publicity campaigns directed at IMCG and IPS members, six basically suitable research manuscripts are already being peer-reviewed in addition to the material that is being prepared from Tampere and South Africa. Thereafter, perhaps this venture will be just what we decide to make of it.

Olivia Bragg
09 November 2004

More doubts of a more basic nature from Ulrich Graf:

I am hesitating to support the initiative for a new journal, jointly published by IMCG and IPS, for the following reasons:

- The basic interests of the two organisations are different, they are even conflicting. IMCG is an organisation of people who are working for mire conservation. IPS is an organisation of people and /or companies that use mires for their economic benefit. The relationship between both organisations is similar to that of a trade union towards an organisation of employers.
- This does not mean that collaboration with IPS or its members should not take place at all. I think that in some cases it is useful to give advice or to do joint research (for example with respect to restoration or with respect to alternatives to peat in horticulture).
- IMCG is a conservation organisation. Its only aim is to conserve mires. To my opinion carrying out or funding mire research is not an aim of IMCG, except if this research is serving the conservation of mires.
- IMCG should try to convince IPS to give up any activities in mires that are not sustainable. I am afraid this relates to almost all of the activities of IPS members.
- Too close contacts with IPS – by establishing a joint platform like a journal – could erode the consciousness that there are basic conflicts of interests. And I fear that publishing a joint journal could spread the impression, that IMCG tolerates certain forms of mire exploitation, and that IPS might abuse the joint platform for their propaganda (for example by trying to certify peat in Europe as a renewable product).

Ulrich Graf, Switzerland

Olivia's response:

As already explained in my response to Ab, I can lay to rest Ulrich's fears that the editorial policy of the journal will be biased towards IPS propaganda – or IMCG propaganda for that matter. This will be a peer-reviewed research journal with an identity of its

own, operating in an area where the interests of the two organisations overlap.

As far as the overlap is concerned, neither IPS nor IMCG claims to be a learned society or a research organisation; but both have a number of researchers amongst their respective memberships, and both need the results of research – for example to support IMCG’s Action Plan Objective A: to identify the global diversity of mire features, functions, and values.

I am most grateful to Ulrich for identifying several new areas of focus for the journal. What better vehicle could there be for reporting the results of common IMCG/IPS research on peatland restoration and peat alternatives – and perhaps also on Sphagnum farming? The research that is needed to

improve our understanding of how to conserve mires will also require a publication medium. And then there are the concepts of sustainability and renewability, whose applications in the context of peat and peatlands need urgent clarification through careful, objective, peer-reviewed research in order to give a firm foundation for practical applications of the wise use approach. Stop hesitating, Ulrich, and let’s get on with it!

Olivia Bragg
10 November 2004

Please join the discussions and send your comments to the secretariat.

**Project evaluation reports from GPI phase 2
are now available on the gpi website.**

Surf to

www.globalpeatlands.net

and select

“project and programmes.”

3rd Meeting CoCo-GAP

The Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (CoCoGAP) met for the third time on 29-30 October 2004 in Wageningen International Conference Centre, The Netherlands.

The tasks entrusted to the CoCo-GAP through Ramsar Resolution VIII.17, adopted by the 8th Conference of Parties (COP8), are to prepare an implementation plan for global action on peatlands (§ 18), and to produce a report on the progress in implementing the Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands, including recommendations on future priorities, to be submitted to Ramsar COP9 (§ 21).

The tasks for the meeting were:

- To bring together the necessary elements for the draft Progress Report that needs to make reference to the seven thematic approaches outlined in the Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands
- To decide on the elements which are to constitute a draft Implementation Plan

- To finalise the texts on Emerging Issues and Recommendations to be annexed to the Progress Report
- To discuss the work programme of CoCo-GAP and ways of proceeding with work leading to COP9 in November 2005 in Kampala, Uganda, and
- To discuss the details of a possible Side Event to be organized during COP9.

In three working groups the introductory, narrative texts for the three groups of **key issues** were elaborated, covering:

- regulation and natural functions of peatlands (drafting lead author: Tatiana Minayeva), including peatlands and climate change, fire as a major issue, peatlands and water regulation, peatlands for biodiversity
- peatlands and people - social values (drafting lead author Marcel Silvius), featuring peatlands and poverty alleviation, peatlands and their cultural values

– production values (drafting lead author Hans Joosten), dealing with peatlands and agriculture, forestry, peat as energy source, peatlands and infrastructural developments.

The working groups further elaborated a list of **key recommendations** addressed to Contracting Parties (CPs) and other stakeholders suggesting specific actions to be undertaken. They will form part of the “Implementation Plan.”

Furthermore, a number of **integrating initiatives** (programmes and projects) were identified that should form part of a portfolio to illustrate the “Implementation Plan”.

It was agreed that a drafting team of Herbert Diemont, Marcel Silvius, and Hans Joosten should bring together the elements outlined above to form a first complete draft “Progress Report” with the annexes mentioned. Tobias Salathé would then check this draft report and make possible complements from Ramsar’s side before circulating it to all CoCo-GAP members for comments in late November 2004. Comments would need to be included by early December 2004 in order to send this draft document for comments to the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) prior to its 13th meeting on 1-5 February 2005. At this stage the draft progress report will also be sent to all STRP national focal points for comments.

The peatland-related information to be provided by Contracting Parties in their National Reports for COP9 (by 28 February 2005) would subsequently be incorporated into the draft report where necessary, before sending it to the Sub-group of the Standing Committee on COP9, meeting on 1-4 March 2005 in Kampala, Uganda (where COP9 will take place 7-15 November 2005).

Subsequently the revised report would be ready for printing in the new series of “Ramsar Technical Reports” and could then be sent to the Parties prior to COP9. It is not yet possible to prepare a resolution in detail because the Ramsar Standing Committee still

has to adopt rules on how to handle technical Resolutions for COP9. Tobias Salathé will inform CoCo-GAP members on the exact procedures, once the decisions have been taken.

It was decided to elaborate an illustrative brochure, along the model of the brochure “What’s in water” by the Ramsar Secretariat. This should be used for outreach at different meetings and occasions, and to create a wider awareness of the key peatland issues as outlined in the progress report. Faizal Parish is taking the lead of this project, helped by Tatiana Minayeva, Gerry Hood, Herbert Diemont, and Magnus Brandel. Financing would be provided through the UNEP-GEF project, GPI, and IPS.

It was decided to follow up the idea of having a major “event” during COP9. To attract a maximum of participants, this should probably be coupled with an African cultural event and focusing also on African peatlands. Piet-Louis Grundling will lead the preparations for this event, helped by Marcel Silvius, Gerry Hood, Excellent Hachileka, Jan Sliva, and Faizal Parish. Tobias Salathé will provide information on available infrastructure, logistics, and Ugandan focal points as soon as available.

Furthermore, the holding of a workshop, probably to take place before COP9 was agreed on a proposal by Jan Sliva. Specific participants would need to be invited for this, IPS could provide some money. (After the meeting it became clear that IUCN will not organise a Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF) as they did prior to earlier COPs. Thus, this organisational framework will not be available prior to COP9 in Kampala.)

The meeting was closed by TS at 16h20, thanking all for their active participation. And thanking specifically Herbert for his organisation work, including the evening on the top of the Wageningse Berg with drinks, music, food, and cigars.

Based on draft minutes by Tobias Salathé

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Peat fires in Indonesia, the facts

by Jack Rieley

Tropical peatlands are one of the largest carbon stores on earth, release of which has implications for climate change (Page 2002). In a natural state, lowland tropical peatlands support a luxuriant growth of peat swamp forest (PSF) overlying peat deposits up to 20 metres thick, but any persistent environmental change, particularly decrease in wetness, threatens their stability and makes them susceptible to fire. Fires were widespread on the extensive peatlands of Indonesia during the 1997 El Niño and recurred in 2002 and 2004. By using satellite imagery and ground measurements within a 2.5 million hectare study area in Central Kalimantan it was determined that 32% (0.79 Mha) of the area burned in 1997, of which peatland accounted for 91.5% (0.73 Mha), releasing 0.19-0.23 Gt of carbon to the atmosphere through peat combustion. It was estimated that between 0.81-2.57 Gt of carbon were released to the atmosphere from Indonesia's peatlands in 1997 as a result of burning peat and vegetation. This is equivalent to 13-40% of the mean annual global carbon emissions from fossil fuels and contributed greatly to the largest increase in atmospheric CO₂ content detected since records began in 1957. Forest and peat fires in 2002 burned much of the same area that was affected in 1997 releasing probably around 25% of the carbon that was lost in the previous burn.

In addition to fire, tropical peatland cleared for agriculture and settlement subsides at rates between 2 and 10 cm per year, slowly releasing stored carbon to the atmosphere.

Tropical peatlands cover approximately 20 million hectares (Mha) in Indonesia, constituting nearly 11% of the total land area of the country. More than 50% of the peat exceeds 2 metres in thickness, ranging from 0.5 m to 20 m. The vast majority of these peatlands are lowland, rain-fed ecosystems with a natural vegetation cover of peat swamp forest.

Studies of the ecology and environmental importance of the tropical peatland resource have been carried out since 1993, in Central Kalimantan (the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo) Province of Indonesia, which has approximately 5 million hectares of peatland. This research project was already established when Indonesia was affected by the 1997 El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) event and therefore well placed to observe and measure some of its environmental consequences.

The climatic changes brought about by ENSO events have global consequences, with effects particularly pronounced in Indonesia and other parts of the Western Pacific where drought often results. ENSO events have occurred several times over the last three decades, resulting in extended dry seasons with droughts of varying severity. Prior to 1997, the most prolonged dry period was in 1982/83 when there were severe forest fires in East Kalimantan and more

than 3 Mha of land burned, including 0.55 Mha of peat swamp forest. There were less severe droughts and associated fires in 1987, 1991, and 1994.

In Central Kalimantan, in non-ENSO years, there is a dry season of usually three or four month's duration between May/June and September. Normal dry seasons are, however, usually relatively wet. During the 1997 ENSO, the dry season began as early as March and continued through into December, i.e. there were eight months without appreciable rainfall.

At the start of the 1997 dry season, as is normal in every dry season, many fires were started by local farmers and estate managers in order to clear deforested land of vegetation in preparation for planting domestic and plantation crops. Many of these fires spread into forest areas where they burned with great intensity. In Kalimantan, South Sumatra, and Irian Jaya, fires were started on, or reached areas of peatland, burning both the vegetation and the underlying peat. In Central Kalimantan, the situation was exacerbated by a massive peatland conversion project - the so-called Mega Rice Project (MRP). This scheme was initiated in 1995 with the aim of converting 1 Mha of wetland, mostly peatland, to agricultural use. Throughout the MRP area extensive, deep drainage and irrigation canals were excavated, much of the peat swamp forest was logged over and, during 1997, fire was being used as a rapid land clearance tool.

Various estimates have been made of the amount of land in Indonesia that was damaged by the 1997 fires. Initial estimates indicated that approximately 4.5 Mha of land had been affected, but more detailed assessments doubled this figure to 9 Mha. Of this latter area, as much as 1.45 Mha was believed to be peat and swamp forest although no one made credible estimates of the area of peatland affected by fire at the time. We presented evidence to show that it was probably much larger than previously believed, between 2.4 and 5.8 million hectares, with correspondingly much greater transfers of carbon to the atmosphere of 0.81 to 2.57 Giga (Billion) tonnes.

The two most intensive sources of smoke and particulate matter were the fires centred on the peatlands of Central Kalimantan and the Riau area of South Sumatra. Here both vegetation and underlying peat caught fire, contributing greatly to the so-called haze (particulate-laden smog), which blew north-westwards to affect Singapore and Malaysia. During this time solar radiation in Central Kalimantan was reduced to 40% of normal levels whilst visibility was reduced to 25 metres.

It has been estimated that the financial consequences of the fires were over US\$ 3 billion from losses in timber, agriculture, non-timber forest products, hydrological and soil conservation services, and biodiversity benefits, whilst the haze cost an additional US\$ 1.4 billion, most of which was borne

by Indonesians for health treatment and lost tourism revenues.

At the present time, the peatlands of Southeast Asia represent a globally important carbon store, which has accumulated over 26,000 years or more. In recent decades, however, an increasing proportion of this store has been converted to a carbon source, through a combination of deforestation, land-use change and fire. The widespread peatland fires that occurred throughout Indonesia during the strong ENSO-related drought of 1997 resulted in the combustion of 0.87-2.57 Gt (Bt) of stored carbon that took between 1000 and 2000 years to accumulate, with up to 8% of the total carbon store within the peat being released in a few months (Page et al., 2002). At the current estimated rate of carbon accumulation in Central Kalimantan peatlands of 85 g m⁻² yr⁻¹, this single fire event represents an approximate loss of between 70 and 200 years of carbon sink function.

The Southeast Asian region is currently subject to increasing climatic variability (Easterling et al., 2000; Heaney, 1991) and it is predicted that seasonal precipitation extremes associated with future ENSO-events are likely to become more pronounced (Meehl & Washington, 1996). This may lead to reduced water supply to and retention by peatlands, leading to a lowering of water tables. This will limit the rate of peat accumulation where it is still taking place,

enhance degradation and oxidation on peatlands that are no longer actively forming peat, and greatly increase the likelihood of peatland fires, with consequent rapid loss of stored carbon. In conclusion, increased climatic seasonality and variability has the potential to switch the tropical peatland ecosystems of Southeast Asia from carbon sinks to carbon sources.

Unless land use policies are changed to control logging and to drain and clear peatland for plantations, recurrent fires will lead to a complete loss of Indonesia's peat swamp forests and continued, high emissions of CO₂ to the atmosphere.

Scientists are demanding intensive national and international efforts to avoid further fires in the tropical peat swamp forests of Southeast Asia that lead to the release of huge amounts of carbon dioxide. They ask politicians to act now.

References

Page et al., 2002: "The amount of carbon released from peat and forest fires in Indonesia during 1997". *Nature*, 420: 61-65.

More information is available from Jack Rieley: rieleyconsultants@btinternet.com

Peat fires in Indonesia, a call for action

Recurrent peat and forest fires in Indonesia release huge amounts of carbon to the atmosphere and threaten human health and regional economies.

A group of European and Indonesian scientists from The Universities of Nottingham and Leicester, UK, University of Munich, Germany, University of Helsinki, Finland and University of Palangka Raya, Indonesia is calling for politicians and international aid donors to save the peat swamp forests of Indonesia and help prevent huge emissions of carbon that could be contributing to global warming.

More than 10 years of scientific research carried out by Darwin Initiative and European Union funded research projects in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia has provided a detailed benchmark against which to measure the impact of major forest and peatland fires that have been occurring frequently since 1997. This retrospective study evaluated the impact of the 1997/1998 El Niño-driven fire disaster, during which forest and peatland fires destroyed huge areas of peat swamp rainforest and peatland drained for agriculture in Southeast Asia. It was the biggest fire catastrophe ever seen in the region, leaving a 3,000 x 5,000km noxious, yellow cloud of noxious 'haze' over several countries for several months, affecting human health and economies in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia,

Brunei and Thailand. The economic damage resulting from the smoke alone was estimated to exceed \$2 billion, closing airports, schools and offices and disrupting trade.

Subsequently, fires occurred in the same locations in Kalimantan and Sumatra in 2002 and reached serious proportions once more until they were extinguished at the onset of the rainy season. An update of this serious situation is being published in a feature article in *Nature* on 10th November 2004. These fires are helping to convert tropical peatlands from carbon stores to carbon sinks and released an amount of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere in only a few months in 1997 equivalent to 16-40% of that emitted globally from consumption of fossil fuels in one year. The process continues every year in Indonesia and Malaysia when the dry season comes round again.

It is highly likely that tropical peatland fires and peatlands converted to agriculture are contributing to the accelerating increase of carbon dioxide detected in the atmosphere since 1998 and which has speeded up further since 2002.

Suwido Limin of the Centre for International Cooperation in Management of Tropical Peatland (CIMTROP) at the University of Palangka Raya,

Central Kalimantan, Indonesia wrote a few weeks ago:

“During October 2004, the atmosphere in and surrounding Palangka Raya has been covered by thick smoke. Since 18 October 2004, the Air Pollution Index has indicated that air quality has reached a dangerous level. Since Tuesday 19 Oct 2004 the visibility has been only about 400 - 500 m at midday and 100 - 200 m in the morning. Today (Thursday 21 Oct 2004) it is worse than yesterday. Since Tuesday some flights from and/or to Jakarta – Palangka Raya have been cancelled. The Local Government has decided to declare a holiday for students (nursery and elementary school) since yesterday.”

The Indonesian Government is virtually powerless to act and deal with this emergency, mainly because of a lack of financial and human resources to control the situation.

Burning of vegetation and peat has long been practiced in the peatland areas of Indonesia as the principal tool in clearing land for agriculture and human settlement. In recent years, inappropriate development projects (e.g. the Mega Rice Project), plantations of oil palm and illegal logging have all added to the increased incidence and severity of fires, especially in Kalimantan and Sumatra (see RS images of ‘hot spots’ and ‘haze’).

In 2002 Suwido Limin organised several volunteer groups of local people to combat some of the more serious fire incidents, especially those that threatened the city of Palangka Raya, the provincial capital of Central Kalimantan and international research facilities in the upper catchment of the Sebangau River. These were the only fire-fighting groups to have success because they entered the peat swamp wilderness to find the locations of fire outbreaks and developed techniques to extinguish the fires, especially to obtain water in sufficient quantity to be effective.

On Friday 15, October 2004 Suwido Limin sent a letter to the Governor and Parliament of Central Kalimantan with an appeal, suggesting that the provincial Government and local communities anticipate the increase in fire and smoke by taking real actions. He asked that an emergency budget be allocated for fire suppression. Suwido intends to organize 7 fire-fighting groups (TSA) in Palangka Raya Municipality if he can raise sufficient financial support from local government, donor agencies and other organizations to be ready to deal with peatland fires when they break out again. This will involve recruiting around 150 people who need to be maintained in the field for days at a time. They have to be fed, watered, transported and paid a small remuneration for leaving their own homes and livelihoods. The Governor of Central Kalimantan is supporting an appeal to raise 90.000€ (110,000\$) to train local people to undertake fire prevention and suppression activities so they are more prepared to deal with fires when they start again.

So far Suwido has been promised 5.000€ from the Global Peatland Initiative and 10.000€ from IUCN in The Netherlands. This is not enough so a major purpose of this meeting today is to invite financial contributions from donors in the UK and around the world. The work is unpleasant and arduous; living and working in a tropical peat swamp is no fun and the teams have to carry all of the equipment on their backs and, when they reach their destination, they have to cut down trees to make fire breaks and bore wells deep into the ground to find water to use for fire control.

Suwido organised one Fire Patrol Unit to suppress fire in the upstream part of the Sebangau River a few weeks ago, even though he does not have any money for this purpose. He calls upon donor agencies and individuals to support his actions to suppress forest and peatland fires in Central Kalimantan.

For further information contact Ir. Suwido Limin: suwido@palangkaraya.wasantara.net.id

Good news for the Peatswamp Forests of Central Kalimantan, Indonesia.

by Marcel Silvius

The Minister of Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, Mrs van Ardenne, has adopted for 2005 an amendment to the Dutch budget for development cooperation, which will enable financing in the order of Euro 5 million in 2005 and 10 million of structural funding each following year for the conservation and restoration of the peatswamp forests of Central Kalimantan, integrated with poverty reduction.

The funding is targeted at “stopping the deforestation of the peatswamp forests on Kalimantan, Indonesia, recognising their crucial importance - locally, regionally and globally for their importance for poverty reduction, conservation of biodiversity, and

prevention of CO₂ emissions.” The 5 million for 2005 is meant as a bridging facility, while for the structural funding as of 2006 also other sources will be sought, e.g. the Clean Development mechanism and other donors.

The amendment was developed as a result of intensive lobbying of the Netherlands-based conservation community, including Wetlands International. At the invitation of IUCN-NC's Working Group The Hague, Marcel Silvius presented on 13 October the case of the peatswamp forests of Central Kalimantan before an audience of members of parliament, political advisors, and representatives

of the conservation organisations, and made a plea for this special allocation of Dutch development cooperation funding. The plea was followed up next day by a motion of the Christen Union and Christen Democrats proposing the amendment. With the decision of 2 November this has now been approved. The peat swamp forests in Central Kalimantan include the Mawas, Sebangau and ex-mega rice project areas. These wetlands hold some of the largest remaining populations of the Orang Utan. They are being threatened by uncontrolled logging, drainage and fires. Wetlands International has already worked for several years in cooperation with GEC and local partners in the area, focusing efforts on cooperation with local communities. Wetlands International is coordinating its activities from its Indonesian headquarters in Bogor, and a local project office in Palangkaraya. The WI activities are financed by CIDA and UNEP-GEF and have been successful in restoring the hydrology of several critical areas. It involved building 7 dams so far of up to 25 meters width in the up to 10 meter deep drainage channels of the failed ex-mega rice project. The construction works were implemented by the local communities to the design made by local engineers, applying various soft-soil engineering techniques. These dams represent the first serious attempt on the ground to counter the ongoing drainage of the peatland, which has led to fires that produced 0,5 gigaton of carbon emissions in 1997 alone, just from this area. The forest also created significant health problems of local people and significant economic damages in losses of timber and reduced tourism. The location of the dams was strategically chosen to be most effective in safeguarding the Mawas peat swamp forests which have become part of a conservation concession managed by the BOS Foundation. Other foreign organizations active in the region include CARE, WWF and Alterra.

The problems in the area are a combination of poverty and environment issues which will require long-term investments to overcome. Wetlands International has therefore lobbied for a financial mechanism that will enable a sustainable funding source targeted not only at the conservation and restoration of the peat swamp forests, but particularly also at investments in alternative income sources for the local communities. This was conveyed to the Dutch parliament through a written inquiry by Mrs Huizinga of the Christian Union. In response, the Dutch Minister of Development Cooperation has specifically stated that it is intended that this will be a long-term funding scheme, and that she will pursue the establishment of a Multi-donor Trust Fund.

Options to channel the funding via this financial mechanism will be investigated. She also stated that the implementation should be arranged with the local

and national authorities of Indonesia, and that the funding should be carefully monitored.

On a related note:

Indonesia, Germany to sign US\$60m debt swap deal

November 08, 2004

The German government will sign on Monday two debt-swap agreements with the Ministry of Finance, leading to a 48 million euros (US\$61.81 million) writing off of Indonesia's obligation to the country upon their implementation.

The first debt-swap agreement will be used to finance the improvement of junior high level education in the eastern part of Indonesia, by constructing 100 new schools in the region.

The other debt swap will be used to fund several nature conservation projects in Indonesia. This US\$400 million debt swap focuses on the conservation of what was once peatland in Kalimantan.

Debt swaps are usually carried out to reduce a country's debt by requiring the debtor to spend a specified amount of the original debt to finance certain programs that are of concern to the donors. As a consequence, the borrowing country does not have to repay the amount of the debt that is used for these programs.

Debt swaps are seen as feasible options for the country to reduce its high overseas debt burden as it can no longer seek debt rescheduling via the Paris Club after Indonesia graduated from the International Monetary Fund-sponsored economic reform program. Under the Indonesian-German debt-swap scheme, Germany will write off a certain amount of debt after Indonesia spends 50 percent of the renounced amount in rupiah on projects that have been agreed by both governments.

The implementation of all the projects under the debt-swap deals is monitored by German development bank KfW's branch in Jakarta.

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

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Peatlands in the news

Recently, articles have appeared in several high profile and popular scientific magazines. Below you may find links to the online versions of these articles.

In the November edition of National Geographic, there is an article titled "Support for Saving Peatlands Is Squishy but Solidifying:"

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/11/1105_041105_peatlands.html

In the New Scientist of July, there is an article titled "Peat bogs harbour carbon time bomb:"

<http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99996124>

Also in New Scientist, but in the November edition, you may find "Massive peat burn is speeding climate change:"

<http://www.newscientist.com/news/news.jsp?id=ns99996613>

The November 11 issue of Nature features an article on the burning bogs of Indonesia, "Land remediation: Borneo is burning:"

<http://info.nature.com/cgi-bin24/DM/y/hQ5N0BgVMK0Ch0VZ30AO>

As well as an editorial "Burning issues:"

<http://info.nature.com/cgi-bin24/DM/y/hQ5N0BgVMK0Ch0VZp0AP>

International Workshop on Peatland Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use

A Workshop on Peatland Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use was held in Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, China from 7-9 July 2004. The workshop was jointly organized by International Forestry Cooperation Centre of the State Forestry Administration, China Wildlife Conservation Association, Wetlands International, Global Environment Centre, and the Gansu Forestry Department, with support from UNEP-GEF and other partners. It was attended by more than 90 experts and representatives from a broad range of government agencies, research institutes, and NGOs from 11 countries, primarily from NE and SE Asia.

The workshop examined three main themes: Conservation and Sustainable Use of Peatlands, Restoration and Rehabilitation, and International and Regional Cooperation. Peatland issues were highlighted in more than 30 technical presentations and in-depth working group meetings. A technical visit was undertaken from 10-16 July to review management of the high altitude Ruoergai Peatlands in Gansu and Sichuan Provinces

Concern was raised that despite their great importance, peatlands throughout East Asia are being rapidly degraded and destroyed – primarily as a result of extensive uncontrolled drainage and land conversion, overgrazing, deforestation, and fire. In some countries more than 50% of peatlands have been lost or degraded with major social and environmental impacts. Extensive peatland fires in SE Asia have caused billions of dollars of damage in the past decade and contributed greatly to global environmental degradation. In NE Asia overgrazing and drainage of upland peatlands has led to

desertification as well as water shortages. Conversion of lowland peatlands has contributed to major flooding and associated loss of life and property.

Root causes of peatland degradation include poor understanding of peatland values and functions as well as impacts of land use changes; unclear or conflicting policies and institutional frameworks relating to peatland protection and use; insufficient technical and organizational capacity and resources for peatland management agencies; poverty and lack of alternate livelihood options for local communities in peatland areas; as well as changes in local and global climate.

The Chinese State Council recently instructed all provincial governments to place close attention to the protection and restoration of wetlands including peatlands at all levels. Moreover, the Council adopted a strategic plan for wetland conservation for the next 50 years, prepared by 10 Ministries led by the State Forestry Administration. This strategy includes key targets such as the inclusion of 90% of the remaining natural wetlands in protected areas and the restoration of 1.4 million ha of wetland areas, and the designation of 60 additional Ramsar sites

The Workshop produced a recommendation document focussing on local, national, regional, and global levels.

Please surf to http://www.peat-portal.net/ev_en.php?ID=2819_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC for an MS Word version of the recommendation document and for more information.

source: <http://www.peat-portal.net>

We welcome any peatland related biodiversity and climate change expert, who would like to be involved in this activity on a voluntarily basis, to express interest and we are still looking for more Lead Authors, to contribute mainly to the writing and research of existing literature on specific chapters; as well as more Contributing Authors, to provide Lead Authors with information/knowledge on specific areas and topics.

For a detailed outline of the assessment and more information, contact:
David Lee, Technical Officer,
Global Environment Centre,
Petaling Jaya, Selangor, MALAYSIA
E-mail (office): david@genet.po.my
Website: www.peat-portal.net

Peat Matters

PeatMatters is a newsletter developed under the Outreach Component of the Project on Integrated Management of Peatlands for Biodiversity and Climate Change. It is intended to enhance understanding at global level on peatland issues by informing readers of key issues on peatlands, biodiversity, and climate change, progress on the project implementation, as well as upcoming events and projects.

The first issue focuses on introducing the project and some of the main activities. Features are given on some of the recent international workshops organised and on linkages developed with the environmental conventions. Future issues will showcase some the results from the country components in China, Indonesia, and Russia as well as the regional activities in SE Asia. More general news items and feedback from members will also be included.

This newsletter is one of a number of communication and outreach tools being developed under the project. Other electronic communication mechanisms are the peat-portal web site, and electronic discussion groups.

PeatMatters is distributed free of charge to anyone interested.

To subscribe or receive a free issue, please email to david@genet.po.my or visit www.peat-portal.net

World Wetlands Day 2005

Each year, 2 February is World Wetlands Day (WWD). It marks the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. WWD was celebrated for the first time in 1997 and made an encouraging beginning. Each year since 1997, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and groups of citizens at all levels of the community have taken advantage of the opportunity to undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general and the Ramsar Convention in particular. From 1997 to 2004, the Convention's Web site has posted reports from more than 80 countries of WWD activities of all sizes and shapes, from lectures and seminars, nature walks, children's art contests, sampan races, and community clean-up days, to radio and television interviews and letters to newspapers, to the launch of new wetland policies, new Ramsar

Sites, and new programmes at the national level. Government agencies and private citizens from all over the world have sent us their news, often with photographs, and these annual summaries and 600+ individual reports, with more than 900 images, make an excellent archive of ideas for future celebrations.

And each year since 1997, the Ramsar Secretariat, with generous financial assistance from the private sector Danone Group, has offered a new selection of posters, stickers, videos, pocket calendars, leaflets and information packs **free** of charge and has suggested a unifying theme for the benefit of those who wish to use it.

Surf to http://www.ramsar.org/wwd2005_index.htm for more information and for promotional materials.

source: www.ramsar.org

Regional News

News from the EU: LIFE funding

Information concerning the 2005 round for LIFE-Nature and LIFE-Environment has been updated. Practical information on how to apply for funding under LIFE-Environment (demonstration and preparatory projects), LIFE-Nature, and LIFE-Third Countries: annual deadlines, application forms, who to contact etc can be found at the following link:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/funding/index.htm>

The call for proposals for LIFE 2004-2005 has been published in the Official Journal on 12 October 2004 (OJ 252 of 12.10.2004), at the following link:

http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/archive/2004/c_25220041012en.html

General information for LIFE III:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/life/index.htm>

Eurosite launches 'new guidance' for site managers

In 1997, the Eurosite Management Planning Toolkit was published and has been a great help for many site managers throughout Europe. During the Annual Meeting held on 25 September 2004 in the Oder Delta Valley in North-west Poland, the Management Planning Guidance was endorsed by the Eurosite network.

Eurosite is deeply involved in developing and advocating the protection of Natura 2000 sites. The European Union has underlined this role of Eurosite and has chosen Eurosite to realise the Natura Network Initiative, a project to raise public and stakeholder awareness of Natura 2000 and promote good practice in the management of Natura 2000 sites throughout Europe (Natura 2000 sites in the EU25 account for approximately 20% of Europe's land surface). Europarc and ELO are Eurosite's project partners in this initiative.

The Management Planning Guidance is developed under the responsibility of Mr. Eddie Idle, former President of Eurosite, and Dr. Tim Bines, former General Manager of English Nature. The endorsement means that this Guidance will be made available to all the members of Eurosite and translated into many European languages. The Guidance is available online.

More information on the work of Eurosite can be found at www.eurosite-nature.org

Agreement between BirdLife and Hunters Federation

BirdLife International and the Hunters Federation in the EU (FACE) have signed an agreement on the Birds Directive. The Agreement is the result of the Sustainable Hunting Initiative started by the European Commission three and half years ago, to which BirdLife and FACE were invited to be the main stakeholders. In the past the relationship between BirdLife International and FACE has often focused around fights regarding the amendment of the Birds Directive. FACE wanted to amend it (with regard to hunting dates in particular) whereas BirdLife wanted to keep it as it is.

BirdLife strongly welcomed the agreement which recognises the importance of the Birds Directive as an appropriate instrument for the Conservation of Birds at the EU level. Furthermore, both organisations agree not to take measures to amend the Directive. Other points include the recognition of the importance of the Natura 2000 Network and the call for action on illegal hunting and introduction of alien species.

European Habitats Forum (EHF) Meeting

Brussels : 27-28 Oct 2004

The two key topics of this meeting concerned the enlargement of the European Union and consequent extension of the Habitats Directive into the new Member States, and the fact that the explicit financial instrument for funding environmental work (LIFE funding) is going to be phased out and replaced by integrating environmental obligations within financial instruments and programmes run by other Directorates. Consequently a meeting was held towards the end of the first day with Mr Eddy Hertog, DG Regio, to obtain some sense of how environmental initiatives might be addressed under this new system. It quickly became clear that the main expectation of DG Regio is that Member States themselves will be required to provide most of the funding for such initiatives as a normal part of their obligations, but that DG Regio would be prepared to withhold Structural Funds for larger projects if environmental obligations were not also being met. In Mr Hertog's opinion, there would be no possibility of 'ring-fencing' an allocation within the Structural Funds for Natura 2000 and other environmental initiatives. Bids for environmental work would have to seek funds from the same pot as bids for all other issues.

This theme was further developed the following day at a meeting with DG Environment, where Nick Hanley confirmed that the main instruments for providing funds for Natura 2000 in future would be the EU Cohesion Fund, Rural Development funds,

Structural Funds, and an instrument called LIFE+, which will cover those aspects that cannot easily or logically be covered through other funds – particularly for innovative site management, management planning, development of monitoring methods, and training and communication.

One thing that comes through current debates is that there is a substantial mis-match between what Member State Environment Ministers are calling for in terms of EU funding for the environment, and what the Council of Ministers (i.e. Premiers and Treasury Ministers, usually) consistently seeks. The general message is that the Council of Ministers regards the environment as a relatively unimportant issue and thus funding mechanisms reflect this. For a substantial change in direction, it will be necessary to convince Prime Ministers and Treasury Ministers that the environment matters...

The issue of monitoring Natura 2000 was discussed, and a draft paper tabled by DG Environment. Questions were raised about quality control for the monitoring process, and it was agreed that there would probably be something akin to the Biogeographical Seminars that have been held to assess the site lists for the current round.

For the new Member States, a series of Biogeographic Seminars will be held to review their lists. This will be co-ordinated on the EHF side through Andras Krolopp of CEEWEB (krolopp@ceeweb.org).

The EHF has now produced an A4 leaflet called Implementing the Birds and Habitats Directive, which is available from the EHF Secretariat (janice.weatherley@iucn.org), and on 9th November, the President of the European Parliament, Josep Borrell Fontelles, was presented by the EHF with a symbolic pot of plants and a watering can to celebrate the progress of the Habitats Directive, with the message "Take care of Nature, and Nature will take care of you." A potential crisis was (hopefully) averted when Richard during the EHF October meeting suggested that the EHF should make sure that the pot was filled with peat-free compost – an awkward silence suggesting that, up to that point, this was an issue that had not been considered...

Richard Lindsay

News from the UK Peat and wind farms – a report

In October 2003, a catastrophic bog slide occurred near the village of Derrybrien in Co. Galway, Ireland. This bog slide began within the site of a large wind farm development that has permission for 72 turbines. The development area covers most of the summit of Cashlaundrumlahan, which is one of the main peaks in the Slieve Aughty Mountains. Virtually the whole area is dominated by blanket peat, with average peat thicknesses of around 2

metres, but in some areas the depth is more than 5.5 metres. Initially, a large mass of peat slid downslope and travelled some 2.5 kilometres. It then slowed and stopped, but was re-activated some two weeks later during heavy rain, and the peat then travelled more than 20 kilometres along the Derrywee River and entered a major fishing loch, killing more than 100,000 fish of all species and age groups. The developers commissioned two geotechnical reports to determine whether work could continue on the wind farm. The reports both stated that work could continue provided the peat was subjected to a 'robust' drainage programme. Richard Lindsay and Olivia Bragg were commissioned by the local community to assess the quality of the original EIAs for the development, review the possible causes of the disaster, and assess the findings of the geotechnical reports.

The report of this assessment (Wind Farms and Blanket Peat: The Bog Slide of 16th October 2003 at Derrybrien, Co. Galway, Ireland) was launched in Dublin on 26th October, and resulted in considerable media interest. The report highlights:

- the need to consider peat as significantly different in properties and behaviour from most mineral soils;
- that bog slides and bog bursts are surprisingly common, especially when associated with human impact;
- the fact that plantation forestry on peat causes extensive cracking of the peat;
- 'floating' roads laid on the peat are not a practical option for long-term access;
- the need for sympathetic and sensitive water management if disasters are to be avoided;
- drainage does not necessarily stabilise peat;
- the fact that wind farms are being built to reduce CO₂ emissions, yet wind farm construction on peat has the potential to release significant amounts of CO₂ during construction, during the life of the wind farm, and potentially beyond.

Unfortunately only limited supplies of the report are currently available because it was commissioned specifically for use by the local community, but we are exploring with a number of environmental bodies the possibility of funding a larger print run. For the moment, copies of the Executive Summary are available on request.

Richard Lindsay (r.lindsay@uel.ac.uk)

News from Ireland Alien invader on the Bog of Allen

The Bog of Allen is being invaded by *Sarracenia purpurea*, or the Pitcher Plant, a non-native plant in Ireland. The native plants of Irish bogs such as Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*), Ling heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), and Bog asphodel (*Narthecium*

ossifragum) are defeated by this vigorous plant, which is far from its natural home and so is also far from its natural pathogens and competitors. The Irish Peatland Conservation Council is currently conducting a Habitat & Heritage Survey of a sample of the Bog of Allen and was very disappointed to discover the Pitcher Plant growing vigorously on Moud's Bog Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in the Bog of Allen. Moud's Bog is a remnant of the raised bog habitat of the Bog of Allen, which at one time covered an extensive area from Clane in County Kildare to Tullamore in County Offaly.

In the late nineteenth century, the pitcher plant was deliberately introduced to Ireland on a raised bog in County Laois. By 1910 it had died out at this site but it was reintroduced in 1906 on Derrycashel bog in Co. Roscommon. At this site, the roots and seeds of Canadian *Sarracenia purpurea* were planted and twenty years later the pitcher plant had spread to cover thirty-two hectares of the bog. This rapid spread of the plant is an indication of its invasive qualities. When Derrycashel bog was scheduled for exploitation in 1963, the Pitcher Plant was transplanted to other peatlands, including sites in Counties Kildare, Offaly, and Laois. It is likely that this is how the pitcher plant found its way from Canada to the Bog of Allen.

The plant produces many seeds, which are shaken out of canister-like vessels and so are dispersed widely on the bog. As it stands, the patch on Moud's Bog is approximately 100 m², but the danger remains that it may spread to form a larger, extensive colony like that in Derrycashel bog in County Roscommon. If this happens the conservation value of the largest bog remaining in Kildare could be destroyed.

News from The Netherlands: Matthijs Schouten knighted

Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands has knighted our Dutch IMCG member Matthijs Schouten. The award was presented in Dublin (Ireland) by His Excellency Mr Jacobus van der Velden, the Dutch Ambassador to Ireland. In bestowing this honour the Queen of the Netherlands recognised the role Matthijs played in bringing the conservation of Irish bogs to the attention of the international community. Matthijs started researching Irish bogs in the 1970's. He was instrumental in raising awareness of the issues of peatland protection in Ireland, a.o. by founding the Dutch Foundation for the Preservation of Irish Bogs, and continues to inspire bilateral Dutch-Irish research on the conservation and restoration of peatland ecosystems. He teaches Applied Landscape Ecology at University College Cork and University College Galway (Ireland) and in the University of Wageningen (the Netherlands).

The Utrecht Declaration on Wetlands

The 7th INTECOL Conference on International Wetlands, which took place on 25 - 30 July 2004 in Utrecht, the Netherlands, has adopted the "Utrecht Declaration on Wetlands" during its final plenary meeting. In paragraph 4), the meeting notes that "The vast peatlands in the Northern hemisphere, as well as the tropical peatlands in Asia, are of paramount importance for global carbon storage. Further peat mining for fuel or horticultural purposes will lead to an even further loss of carbon storage capacity, and at the same time to rapid oxidation of the extracted peat into carbon dioxide." Please find the full text of the declaration at www.bio.uu.nl/intecol/declaration/.

News from Belarus Peatland rehabilitation workshop

A field seminar-excursion focussing on peatland rehabilitation took place from 7 to 11 October 2004, in the Republic of Belarus. The excursion was organised by Wetlands International Russia Programme and APB Birdlife Belarus.

The goal of the seminar was to develop a scientific and methodical background for peatlands restoration and rehabilitation. To achieve this, experience was exchanged on the planning and implementation of peatland rehabilitation projects in Russia and Belarus, including following items:

- Socio-economical aspects
- Legislation aspects
- Natural-science background
- Technical background
- Some practical approaches
- The most frequent failures and mistakes and their consequences

The 29 participants from Russia (21) and Belarus (8) were joined by Olivia Bragg from Dundee University (Scotland). Interestingly, a quarter of the seminar participants had graduated from the "Darwin peatlands courses" in Dundee.

The seminar was organized as a permanently moving round table. Travelling from one demonstration point to the other, discussions continued in the bus. Various cases were demonstrated: natural paludification of abundant peat fields, projects on rewetting carried out by peat enterprises themselves, and rehabilitation projects realised by NGOs.

The group identified a list of problems and potential obstacles in such projects and discussed the ways to solve them. On the last day, through active brainstorming led by Nikolay Bambalov, Alexander Kozulin, and Tatiana Minayeva, the structure of future Guidelines for peatland rehabilitation was developed. The Guidelines will be attuned to the socio-economic and legislation realities of the FSU countries.

A number of case studies on restoration and rehabilitation was presented by participants during the "moving symposium" directly in the bus while driving 5 hours to Minsk and discussions were active and constructive.

The field symposium was organized and funded in the framework of project PIN MATRA/2003/019 "Conserving Peatlands of Central Russia: the wise use approach to peatlands ecosystem management".

Reported by project coordinator Tatiana Minayeva
See also:

<http://www.imcg.net/docum/belorus04/belorus.htm>

News from Ukraine: Eleven new Ramsar sites

The Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources of Ukraine, in collaboration with the Wetlands International Black Sea Programme and expert staff members from a number of important protected areas around the country, has presented the data, maps, and designation documents for 11 new Wetlands of International Importance, effective 29 July 2004 and covering 28,401 hectares, in a fascinating variety of habitat types. All of them have already been designated as National Parks or Nature Reserves and already have ongoing research activities, in most cases management plans, and in many cases visitor infrastructure. They are found in nearly all parts of the country - coastal sites in Crimea on the Azov and Black Seas (Cape Kazantyp, Karadag, Cape Opuk); a pod or steppe depression also in the south (Chapelsk); a bay of the Dniester River (Bakotska Bay) and a canyon and delta of one of its tributaries (the Smotrych); floodplains near the Russian border in the north (Desna) and more in the center of the country (Dnipro-Oril); a lake formed by mountain landslides in the Carpathians (Synevyr); and extensive peatlands in the Polesie area near the Belarus frontier (Perebrody, Polissia mires), which are part of continuing discussions with Belarus and Poland concerning transboundary management.

Ukraine now has 33 Ramsar Sites covering a surface area of 744,651 hectares. The Convention's global total now reaches 1376 sites covering 122,691,471 ha. Below are descriptions of the new Ramsar sites with peatlands:

Desna River Floodplains. Sumska Oblast; 4,270 ha; 52°19'N 033°23' E. National Park. River network with lakes, oxbows, mires, and floodplain meadow areas, along the border with Russia, with aquatic and riverside vegetation types, swamp, shrubs, meadow, and partly forest. The site supports rare aquatic plant communities listed in the Green Data Book of Ukraine and internationally threatened species such as the Sterlet, the Common Otter, the Eurasian beaver, the Corncrake, and many other birds which nest within the site. Between the new and former

Desna River beds, colonies of grebes, ducks, plovers, sandpipers, gulls, and terns are settled. It is an important reproduction place as well for 33 fish species, which contributes to enriching the ichthyofauna stock of the lower river tributaries. Human activities include nature conservation and recreation activities, regulated hunting and scientific research. Observation of bird migrations and bird ringing during the nesting season are carried out. Ramsar site no. 1398.

Dnipro-Oril Floodplains. Dnipropetrovska Oblast; 2,560 ha; 48°32'N 034°45'E. IBA, Nature Reserve. A well preserved area at the confluence of the Dnipro (or Dneiper) and Oril Rivers, comprising a system of watercourses and related floodplains with numerous lakes, mires, and well-developed flora of vascular plants, including rare communities of *Salvinia natans* and *Trapa natans*, floodplain forests with oak, willow, poplar, and alder. The site is an important nesting place for Oystercatcher, Corncrake, Black Stork, Night Heron, and White Tailed Eagle and represents a key point of the Dnipro bird migration route. Large flocks of Mallard, Garganey, Coot and White-fronted Goose stop over during their autumn migrations. It supports many internationally threatened species such as the mammals *Lutra lutra*, *Castor fiber*, the reptile species *Emys orbicularis*, *Vipera ursinii*, and the amphibian *Bombina bombina*. Some 40 fish species, including the Sterlet *Acipenser ruthenus*, are recorded. The water level depends upon weather conditions but also substantially upon operations of a reservoir built downstream. Ramsar site no. 1399.

Perebrody Peatlands. Rivnenska Oblast; 12,718 ha; 51°42'N 027°07'E. Nature Reserve. The site, including several small lakes, is important for conservation of the typical boreal mire flora and fauna, especially the northern part at the border with Belarus. Sedge-reed communities are concentrated in the central over-damp part of the site and transitional sedge-sphagnum communities prevail at its periphery. The association of *Carex lasiocarpa* with sphagnum mosses is the dominant plant community of the site. Forest and coppice communities cover a large part of it with Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* on islands and dune tops and *Betula pendula*, *Alnus glutinosa* and *Salix alba* in swamp areas. Besides the widespread species of Anatidae and Rallidae, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Common Crane *Grus grus*, Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*, Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, and Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* nest within the site. The presence of the European Otter *Lutra lutra* and *Castor fiber* is registered. During extensive floods every 10 years or so, the site territory can be almost completely covered by water. Ramsar site no. 1402.

Polissia Mires. Zhytomyrska Oblast; 2,145 ha; 51°31'N 28°01'E. Nature Reserve. A large swamp area of transitional mires and oligotrophic bogs fed

by rain and snow waters and, at the border with Belarus, a separated wetland complex of transitional mires and fens integrated in small rivers floodplains. A significant part of the mires is forested with *Betula pubescens* and *Alnus glutinosa*. The site is important for the conservation of the flora and supports rare and endangered species of clubmosses, mosses, algae and the endemic vascular plant *Tragopogon ucrainicus*. Birds such as *Crex crex*, *Ciconia nigra*, *Grus grus*, *Gallinago gallinago* and *Aquila heliaca* use the site for reproduction. *Felix lynx* and *Lutra lutra* are permanently recorded. Scientific research and nature conservation activities are ongoing. Ramsar site no.1403.

Source: www.ramsar.org

News from Iraq: UN Announces Multi-million Dollar Plan to Restore 'Garden of Eden' Marshes

On 23 July 2004, the United Nations announced an \$11 million project to help restore the marshlands of southern Iraq, considered by some to be the site of the Biblical Garden of Eden, after they were massively damaged by dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and a vast drainage operation carried out by the ousted regime of Saddam Hussein.

For the full story go to: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=11447&Cr=Iraq&Cr1>

News from Indonesia: Ramin listed as CITES II species

The listing of ramin in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species' (CITES) Appendix II was adopted by consensus of all 166 member countries at the 13th Conference of CITES Parties.

CITES, a U.N. treaty that has been in effect for nearly 30 years, subjects the international trade of 30,000 species of animals and plants, including 49 tree species, to varying degrees of control through listing in its three appendices according to the degree of threat and protection required. Appendix I applies the most stringent controls on species threatened with extinction, Appendix II regulates trade in species that could potentially lead to extinction, and Appendix III includes species listed by an "individual" country in an effort to enlist international cooperation to control trade from their country.

Forests where ramin grows are also home to endangered species such as orang-utans and Sumatran tigers, which are losing their habitat because of clearing for agriculture and impacts of illegal logging.

In the last century, the number of orang-utans fell by 91 percent in Borneo and Sumatra. Globally, there

were thought to be somewhere between 45,000 and 60,000 orang-utans as recently as 1987. But by 2001 that number had fallen by virtually half, to an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 of the animals, more than half of them living outside protected areas.

The future of the Sumatran tiger is even bleaker. According to WWF the Sumatran tiger could become extinct within a decade, due to poaching and illegal logging. At least 66 tigers have been killed on the western Indonesian island of Sumatra since 1999, and between 400 and 500 now remain.

Ramin is a blond coloured tropical hardwood, native to the fragile peat-swamp forests of Indonesia and Malaysia. As the most valuable wood species in these ecosystems, ramin trees are usually the first target of illegal loggers, and selective logging of these trees is often the first step leading to forest clearance and incursion into national parks. According to the Indonesian conservation group Telapak, processed ramin can fetch up to 1,000 U.S. dollars per cubic metre and usually ends up in private homes as window blinds and baby cots, and in snooker and pool halls all over the world as cue sticks. The greatest demand comes from the United States, Italy, Japan and Britain. The attempt by Indonesia to upgrade the status of ramin from CITES Appendix III to Appendix II is not surprising as it struggles to control the trade - a large part of it illegal.

In 2001, after the Appendix III listing, the Indonesian government banned exports of ramin logs, sawn timber, and veneer sheets in response to decline of the species in the wild, lack of proper harvest management and high level of illegal export. But according to the Asian Conservation Alliance Task Force - a coalition of 30 non-governmental organisations from 10 Asian countries - around 70,000 cubic metres of banned Indonesian ramin are smuggled each year to the Far East in as many as 2,000 shipping containers - from either Singapore or Malaysia.

Being the only other ramin-exporting country in South-east Asia, Malaysia earlier took exception to Indonesia's request to CITES for an Appendix II listing of the hardwood.

source: <http://www.ipsnews.net/>

Lawsuits against 10 companies

The Indonesian government has submitted the case files of three companies that have allegedly damaged the environment to the prosecutor's office, as part of its plan to file a Rp 2 trillion (US\$213 billion) lawsuit.

The case files of seven other companies are expected to be submitted to the prosecutor's office by the end of the year. The three are described as a plantation company, an industrial plant that operates in a forested area, and a forest concessionaire, all located in Bengkalis and Siak regencies.

The director of a plantation company in Minas, Riau - had allegedly ordered that 1,200 hectares of land be

cleared for farming. The clearance of 800 hectares of that land, via the slash-and-burn method, reportedly contributed to the haze shrouding parts of Sumatra Island and neighboring countries.

Local authorities attempted to extinguish the fires, but faced difficulties as most had been lit on peat land. The haze also blanketed parts of mainland Riau. In the neighboring province of Jambi, thick haze caused the city to be blanketed from dusk till dawn last month.

Aside from seeking compensation, the state is also seeking to prosecute the 10 companies based on Law No. 27/1997 on environmental management.

The directors of the 10 companies are being investigated as possible suspects as they are responsible for any dubious decisions that were made.

Source: www.thejakartapost.com

Two New National Parks in Indonesia

WWF's partnership with the Indonesian government to protect the most biologically diverse forests in the world - the last remaining lowland forests on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra - will result in two new national parks. A timber company agreed to retire its logging rights on some of the land that will be used for the parks, and research and advocacy by WWF field staff helped the government decide to create the parks, which are critical habitat for endangered elephants, tigers and orangutans.

The Indonesian government announced at the meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Malaysia that it will create Tesso Nilo National Park on Sumatra and Sebangau National Park on Borneo in 2004. A 2001 WWF study found that the forests in and around the new Tesso Nilo National Park have the highest vascular plant diversity per area ever recorded by science, with 218 species of plants identified in about a 2000 square foot area, about the square footage of the average American home, twice the plant diversity of the Amazon. Yet it was being clearcut at a rate that would have wiped out the forest in less than a decade.

Land for the 217 square mile Tesso Nilo National Park came from two retired logging concessions owned by Inhutani, an Indonesian logging company. WWF is currently negotiating with other companies to retire more logging concessions and increase the acreage of Tesso Nilo National Park. Indonesia has one of the fastest rates of deforestation in the world.

Tesso Nilo National park is home to the critically endangered Sumatran elephant and tiger. Sebangau National Park is home to 2,500-4,500 orangutans, one of the largest known populations of this endangered great ape whose habitat has declined 25-35 percent in just the last decade.

News from Canada:

CSPMA members amend after-use policy

At their Annual Meeting in Quebec City, Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association (CSPMA) members amended the Preservation and Reclamation Policy to incorporate a broader range of after-use options than the original document. In the original, the preferred option was peatland restoration. In the amended Policy, there is no preference given to various after-use choices, but rather an equal choice between restoration to peatland, reclamation to agriculture, forestry or wildlife preserve.

This brings the policy more in line with the work being done by the Industrial Research Chair in Peatland Management and the results of the European Bridge Project, Guidelines for Wetland Restoration of Peat Cutting Areas.

Source: Canadian Peat News

News from IPS: Peat "production" 2004

The achievement of goals in peat extraction in the IPS member countries has been relatively unbalanced this year. By 30 September 2004, Donal Clarke from Ireland reported a plan fulfillment of 105%, while, according to Hartmut Falkenberg, the German peat diggers had reached nearly 100% of their goals. Canada reached about 100% of requirements in New Brunswick by the end of August, which is 40% of all Canada's extraction volume. Quebec (about 30 percent of Canada's production) has reached about 75% of their goals. The rest of Canada reported 50-80% of the target, which is below average for this time of year. Overall, Gerry Hood estimates that Canada could have a small shortage, but some regions would face higher losses. Back to Europe, the Swedish peat miners had extracted about 75% of their total requirements by 31 August 2004, according to Bernt Hedlund. The eastern Nordic countries suffered to a high degree from the cold and rainy summer. Nick van de Griendt reported that, in week 33, which was probably the last extraction week in Estonia, most companies had achieved only 40% of their goals. Estonia has had practically daily rain during the summer and the humid autumn weather now makes better results unlikely. In Finland, the peat cutters have extracted 40% of the production goals of fuel peat and about 65% of the goals of horticultural peat by the end of September. As in Estonia, the extraction season can be seen as over for 2004.

source: IPS

News from South Africa: Funding of Wetland Rehabilitation

Wetlands have been destroyed and degraded in South Africa over a period of many decades. The loss of these ecosystems has come at a huge price, since wetlands provide many direct and indirect benefits to individuals and society. In recognition of the social, economic and ecological benefits provided by these systems, wetland protection has gained momentum in South Africa, and this country has embarked on a massive programme of wetland rehabilitation. Although several wetlands have been rehabilitated over the last two decades in South Africa, these have not been evaluated to determine the success of rehabilitation. There is a lack of local research to document the processes underlying the degradation of wetlands (e.g. factors causing the advancement of erosion gullies into wetlands), and such understanding will provide a sound basis on which to choose an appropriate means of rehabilitating individual wetlands. There is furthermore, a lack of protocols and guidelines for prioritising wetlands in terms of the functions that they provide to society, and of their need for rehabilitation.

The present project on Wetland Rehabilitation is the first in a programme envisaged in South Africa by the Water Research Commission, details of which can be viewed on the WRC website <http://www.wrc.org.za/>. Reasons for initiating and operating a national wetland research programme are also related to the management needs of government departments for:

- Information on wetlands and their properties, particularly resource use and economic values,
- Information on the reaction/response to specific interventions and pressures
- Methods on how to implement certain practices
- Guidelines on how to manage wetland areas
- Trained human resources
- Monitoring and reporting programmes
- Evaluation of rehabilitation actions
- Coordination and technology transfer

The existence of a cooperative research programme will therefore greatly enhance the ability of government departments to implement their responsibilities and obligations.

Funds are available to support postgraduate researchers at the Masters and PhD levels, including research funds and an annual maintenance stipend. Also included are funds for fieldwork and participation in meetings inside South Africa. Dissertation projects must complement the project goals described above.

Funds are also available to support postdoctoral students with a background and interest in wetland ecology, hydrogeomorphology and wetland restoration/rehabilitation (including bioengineering).

For further details or an expression of interest, please contact Professor Fred Ellery, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Natal, Durban: Ellery@ukzn.ac.za

New and recent Journals/Newsletters/Books/Reports

Blankenburg, J and W. Tonnis (eds). 2004. Guidelines for Wetland Restoration of Peat Cutting Areas. 60p.

The work for this project began in 1995 when a group of European scientists started the BRIDGE-Project. They studied the groundwater hydrology, soils and vegetation, and atmospheric interactions in lowland cut-over raised peatlands. The results of the work are documented in this book.

The manual, is available as a PDF download with either low or high quality graphics:

Low graphics (2,1 Mb):

www.nlfb.de/boden/downloads/guidelines_screenk.pdf

High graphics (6,5 Mb):

www.nlfb.de/boden/downloads/guidelines_screen.pdf

Revenga, C. and Y. Kura. 2003. Status and Trends of Biodiversity of Inland Water Ecosystems. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Technical Series no. 11.

This 120-page report covers the condition of and threats to inland water ecosystems; a review of inland water species richness, distribution and conservation status; inland water ecosystems and habitats identified as high conservation priority; and data gaps and information needs, and it includes an informative review of 18 other ongoing assessments of water resources and inland water biodiversity, including those by IUCN, BirdLife, WWF, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, CGIAR, LakeNet and others. For the book in PDF format go directly to: <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/publications/cbd-ts-11.pdf>

MacKay, H., P. Ashton, M. Neal and A. Weaver, 2004. Investment strategy for the crosscutting domain: Water and the Environment (Report no. KV 148/04)

The core strategy of the Water Research Commission calls for specific mechanisms to address key strategic issues of national importance; these are dealt with in four crosscutting domains addressing:

- Water and Society;

- Water and the Economy;
- Water and the Environment; and
- Water and Health.

This document provides the strategic context for the Water and Environment domain and describes the proposed investment framework for this domain.

The objective of the domain is to contribute to achieving a situation where our governance systems and our understanding of environmental processes and functioning are aligned to support sustainable water management that meets the needs of society.

The document comprises four sections plus two appendices: Section 1 places the Water and Environment domain within the overall strategy of the WRC and outlines the rationale and scope of the research needs. Section 2 lists the principles, objectives and proposed success criteria for the domain. Section 3 presents the investment framework down to research programme level, whilst Section 4 charts the way forward.

The close linkages between air, water and land, through the hydrological cycle, ensure that surface and ground water resources are strongly influenced by changes and processes that originate within the broader natural environment. Effective and sustainable management of water resources requires that we recognize and account for natural processes as well as human induced impacts occurring in the natural environment, which influence all phases of the hydrological cycle. This is one of the key principles of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM), which underpins South Africa's water policy and legislation.

Incomplete knowledge and understanding of the linkages between environmental components (atmospheric, marine, terrestrial, aquatic, subterranean) within the hydrological cycle, and between the hydrological cycle and governance systems, hinder sustainable water resource management. This crosscutting domain promotes enhanced understanding of whole-ecosystem functioning in the context of the broader environment and its effects on water resources, and supports the development and application of good environmental governance systems. Activities within this domain contribute to sustainable water resources management that meets the changing needs of society, by combining:

- Our understanding of good governance principles; with
- Our knowledge of environmental components (atmospheric, marine, terrestrial, aquatic, subterranean) and processes within the hydrological cycle.

The primary focus will be to integrate existing and new insights generated by research within and between the Water Research Commission's Key Strategic Areas and by other institutions working in related fields. In addition, this domain will stimulate

the generation of specific new knowledge and understanding that will equip the water sector to anticipate and respond appropriately to changes within the biophysical environment. Although this domain is characterized by integrating research at a high / meta-data analysis level, it is recognized that such research is only possible on the assumption that we have a sound foundation of appropriate basic research (and data) in place.

The report is available in hard copy from the Water Research Commission. The report is free to South African residents, while a small fee is charged for requests from outside South Africa.

To order, contact orders@wrc.org.za and quote the report number KV148/04.

Dickens, C., D. Kotze, S. Mashigo, H. MacKay, and M Graham. 2004. Guidelines for integrating the protection, conservation and management of wetlands into catchment management planning (TT220/03).

The Guideline provides a template, or "Critical Path" on which Catchment Management Agencies (CMAs) and other departments or agencies responsible for water management will be able to integrate wetland management into water resources planning and management. The Critical Path intends to help agencies navigate from (a) planning at catchment level for wetlands management and protection, to (b) implementation of wetland protection, rehabilitation and management strategies at site level. The guideline has been specifically written to help wetland managers and water resource managers in South Africa to work together for the wise use of wetlands, and is presented in a clear and jargon-free style to facilitate such co-operation. Many of the concepts and principles are generally applicable and will be of interest to professionals and interest groups in other countries.

The report is available in hard copy from the Water Research Commission. The report is free to South African residents, while a small fee is charged for requests from outside South Africa.

To order, contact orders@wrc.org.za and quote the report number TT220/03.

Tomassen, H.B.M. 2004. Revival of Dutch Sphagnum bogs: a reasonable perspective? PhD thesis University of Nijmegen.

"The restoration and conservation of cut-over bogs are frustrated by various problems..." but Hilde Tomassen proposes a method to solve them. The main conclusion of her very interesting PhD thesis is to re-establish floating mats on deeply inundated cut-over bogs by introducing bunkerde (or poorly humified peat with the appropriate characteristics) from nearby sites, further recommending moderate lime addition for the bog restoration praxis.

Hilde identified the mechanisms influencing the development of floating mats (by means of field

observations and laboratory experiments) and assessed how the development of floating mats can be stimulated in restoration projects.

In detail she examined:

- the importance of physico-chemical peat characteristics for the development of floating mats by comparing inundated and buoyant peat substrates (chapter 2).
- the effect of groundwater chemistry and peat quality on the development of floating mats (chapter 3: in greenhouse, chapter 4: outdoor)
- the effects of high N deposition and desiccation on the expansion of invasive species (*Molinia*, *Betula pubescens*) (chapter 5: field experiments, chapter 6: laboratory experiments under non-desiccated conditions to estimate the critical atmospheric N load for ombrotrophic bog vegetation)
- the eutrophication by bird droppings (chapter 7).

The final chapter (8) contains a summary and evaluation of the results, as well as useful recommendations for the conservation of ombrotrophic vegetation and successful restoration of cut-over bogs.

With respect to the methane balance a more concrete comparison between the different “phases” of bog degradation and floating mat formation would have been desirable.

For more information contact:

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Greta Gaudig

Galand, P.E. 2004. Methanogenic *Archaea* in boreal peatlands. PhD Thesis Univ. of Helsinki. 35p.

Wetlands, including peatlands, are the main source of natural emissions of the green house gas methane (CH₄). The production and release of CH₄, and their regulatory environmental factors have been studied intensively in boreal peatlands, but the communities of methanogenic *Archaea*, responsible for CH₄ formation, remain poorly described.

This thesis investigated the diversity, and activity of methanogens, at the natural Salmisuo fen, at different peat depths of the most representative microsite (*Eriophorum* lawn). Comparison of methanogen communities from two well-defined fen microsites,

Eriophorum lawn and hummock, indicated that populations changed with sites in upper fen layers. In the deeper fen layers, methanogen communities were homogenous across microsites. Novel methanogenic sequences were found at both depths of both sites. Vegetation characterising the microsites probably influences methanogenic communities, and metabolic pathways in the anaerobic layers of the fen.

The diversity of methanogens was lower in the drained bog than in the natural fen. An ash fertilisation trial, intended to simulate forestry practices, demonstrated that ash treatment marginally increased peat pH in anaerobic layers without affecting the major methanogen groups, or the potential methane production. Some Fen cluster-related sequences were, nevertheless, retrieved from fertilized plots only, suggesting a group specific response to increase in soil pH.

Available as PDF-download from:

<http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/julkaisut/bio/bioja/vk/galand/methanog.pdf>

Van Duzer, C. 2004. Floating Islands: A Global Bibliography. Floating Islands. Cantor Press. 428 p.

A unique treasury of information about one of nature’s marvels: floating islands. The bibliography contains more than 1800 citations of books and articles in twenty languages on the subject, annotated and cross-referenced, and with both thematic and geographic indices. All aspects of floating islands are addressed, including their formation, the causes of their buoyancy, their role in the ecology of lakes and wetlands, their flora and fauna, their role in the dispersal of plants and animals, and methods for controlling and managing them. Works are also cited on artificial floating islands used for agriculture, human habitation, wildlife habitat, and improvement of water quality; and floating islands in literature, myth, and legend. The book includes the text and an English translation, with detailed notes, of G. C. Munz’s rare 1711 thesis on floating islands, *Exercitatio academica de insulis natantibus*, as well as photographs of several floating islands.

<http://www.cantorpress.com/floatingislands/>

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UPCOMING EVENTS

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

5th European Regional Meeting on the implementation and effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention

4-8 December 2004, Yerevan, Armenia

For more information contact europe@ramsar.org

Asian Wetland Symposium

6-9 February 2005, Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India.

for more information surf to:

<http://www.aws2005.com/>

Coastal Ecosystems of West Africa (Biological Diversity - Resources - Conservation)

15-16 February 2005, Brussels, Belgium

for more information contact prcm@iucn.org or download the symposium announcement:

www.imcg.net/docum/wa05.doc

First European Chapter meeting of the Society of Wetland Scientists

Spring, 2005, Hull, United Kingdom

for more information surf to:

biology.bangor.ac.uk/~bss113/SWS_Europe.htm

Shallow lakes in a changing world

5-9 June 2005, Dalfsen, The Netherlands

for more information surf to: www.shallowlakes.nl

Coastal Plain Wetlands: Ecological, Landscape, and Regulatory Transformations

5-10 June 2005, Charleston, South Carolina, USA

for more information surf to: <http://www.sws.org>

INTECOL ESA joint meeting: Ecology at multiple scales

7-12 August 2005, Montreal, Canada

for more information surf to:

<http://www.esa.org/montreal>

WETPOL Wetland Pollutant dynamics and Control

4-8 September 2005, Ghent, Belgium

for more information surf to:

<http://www.biomath.ugent.be/wetpol>

17th Annual Conference Ecological Restoration: A Global Challenge

September 12 - 18, 2005, Zaragoza, Spain

for more information surf to:

<http://www.ser.org/content/2005Conference.asp>

IMCG Field Symposium in Tierra del Fuego

21 November – 1 December 2005, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina

for more information see IMCG Newsletter 2004-1 and this Newsletter or contact the IMCG Secretariat.

Ramsar Cop 9

8 – 15 November 2005, Uganda

for more information surf to: www.ramsar.org

SWS travel grants

The Society of Wetland Scientists offers travel awards to international wetland scientists (i.e., those from countries other than US and Canada) to help defray the expense of their attending the SWS meetings. From 5-10 June 2005, the 26th International Wetlands Meeting ('Coastal Plain Wetlands: Ecological, Landscape, and Regulatory Transformations') will be held in Charleston, South Carolina, USA. I am chairing the International Travel Awards Committee and would like to request your help in spreading the word to international wetland scientists that they are welcome to apply for the travel award (includes registration fee and up to \$1500 in travel expenses).

More information, including eligibility requirements and application form, is available on the SWS Web site (<http://www.sws.org/charleston2005/international.htm>). The deadline for applications is December 15, 2004.

Jim Perry, Chair, International Travel Awards Committee (jperry@vims.edu)

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