

Asia

wetlands

Unlike Africa and South America, Asia has experienced wetland loss for thousands of years, with vast wetland areas drained for agriculture or settlement, or converted into rice fields (Table xxx, Moser et al 1996). In some areas, destruction of natural wetlands has been total, e.g. Vietnam's Red River delta floodplains originally covered 17,500 km² but are now non-existent. Much of the 400,000 km² of rice fields in the central plains of India, and the 19,000 km² of paddies in the central plains of Thailand must have been developed at the expense of natural wetlands (Moser et al 1996). Wetlands continue to be degraded or destroyed in Asia; in their overview of the Asian wetland directory, Scott & Poole (1989) report threats at 85% of the 734 sites in the directory for which information was available.

Of particular importance in this region is Indonesia. Scott (1993) reports the loss of 118,000 km² of Indonesia's original 376,000 km² (31%) of wetlands by 1981–82.

Finlayson & Spiers were not able to provide any overall estimate of wetland loss in Asia as too little quantitative data were available. Many wetlands of the region are poorly known, particularly in Bangladesh, China, Bhutan, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Scott & Poole 1989).

Table xxx Harvest area of rice field in Asia (km², after FAOSTAT 1998)

Country	1988	19	19
Afghanistan	1,800	1,800	1,800
Bangladesh	102,242	101,774	102,000
Bhutan	260	300	300
Brunei	9	5	5
Cambodia	17,350	19,287	19,287
China	324,585	313,478	318,478
India	417,358	422,000	425,000
Indonesia	101,382	110,719	112,000
Iran	4,672	6,043	6,050
Japan	21,100	19,530	19,530
Kazakstan		852	800
Kyrgyzstan		50	50
Laos	5,248	5,720	5,720
Malaysia	6,718	6,550	6,450
Myanmar	45,273	57,684	56,000
Nepal	14,505	15,112	15,112
North Korea	7,000	6,110	7,000

Pakistan	20,417	23,159	23,300
Philippines	33,927	38,423	35,140
South Korea	12,601	10,450	10,450
Sri Lanka	8,156	6,601	6,601
Tajikistan		120	120
Thailand	99,059	99,322	92,100
Turkmenistan		380	380
Uzbekistan		1,740	1,500
Vietnam	57,264	70,912	70,912
Total	1,300,926	1,338,120	1,336,084

Large-scale wetland degradation is occurring in the Middle East because of deforestation, overgrazing, reclamation, water diversion for irrigation, increased salinity, expanded urban and coastal development, oil and other pollution, and war damage (Scott 1995). In this region of scarce water resources, drainage, pollution and reclamation for industrial and urban development has put wetlands under particularly severe pressure. Almost all of the original freshwater wetlands in Syria, Lebanon and Israel were drained for agriculture in the early 1900s (Dugan 1993). Drainage of marshes continues, one such example being the systematic drainage of the Mesopotamian marshes in a 20,000 km² area of southern Iraq. Water diversion through dykes and a drainage canal has decreased the area of marshes by 90% since 1972 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/sci/tech/newsid_1332000/1332128.stm, Scott 1995).

peatlands

The South East Asian region comprising areas surrounding the South China Sea and areas in Papua-New Guinea contain large expanses of peatland. According to Lappalainen (1996a) peatlands in Asia cover 1,119,000 km² and other wetlands 149,000 km², totalling 2,268,000 km².

Table 2/6 Mire and peatland resources of Asia

Country	A area of country	B former mire area	A/B (%)	C present mire area	C/B (%)	D present peatland area	D/B (%)
Afghanistan	652.00					0.12	
Armenia	30	0.3	1.0	0.01	2		
Azerbaijan	87	0.2	0.1	0.01	5		
Bangladesh	143.99					6.30	
Brunei	5.80					0.10	
China	9,561.00					10.44	
Fiji	18.30					0.04	
Georgia	70	1	1.4	0.30	30		
India	3,287.60					1.00	
Indonesia	1,904.57					270.00	
Iran	1,648.00					2.90	
Iraq	438.32					17.90	
Israel	20.77					0.05	
Japan	377.71					2.00	
Kazakhstan	2,717.00					2.70	
Kirgizstan	198.50					1.50	
Korea, North	122.07					1.36	
Korea, South	98.50					6.30	
Malaysia	329.75					25.36	
Mongolia	1,565.00						
Myanmar	677.00					9.65	
Oman							
Pakistan	796.10					0.02	
Papua New Guinea	463.00					6.85	
Philippines	300.00					2.40	
Qatar							
Saudi Arabia	2,150.00						
Sri Lanka	64.75					0.05	
Taiwan	36.00						
Tajikistan ⁷⁸	143.00					<0.01	
Thailand	513.11					0.64	
Turkey	779.45					0.56	
Turkmenistan	488.00					N.A.	
Uzbekistan	447.00					<0.01	
Vietnam	330.00					1.00	
West Siberia						760.00	
East Siberia							
Yemen	528.000						
Total						1,119.34	