



Saving wetlands
for wildlife & people



Annual report 2008

Wetland Link International, WWT London Wetland Centre, Queen Elizabeth's Walk, London SW13 9WT UK



Introduction

2008 started with the news that Malcolm Whitehead, our former Head of Learning and WLI, had decided to leave WWT after 5 years of heading up WLI. We wish him well in his new post at ZSL (Zoological Society of London). Chris Rostron started as the new WLI Global Co-ordinator, joining WWT from The Wildlife Trusts where he had managed a network of wetland projects across the UK.

Chris has spent the last 5 months contacting members, updating the database and developing the website. Attendance at the regional WLI Asia meeting and Ramsar COP10 in South Korea provided an excellent opportunity to make links with international partners directly and engage in the Ramsar process. WLI is recognised as a key vehicle for delivering education and awareness activities for the Ramsar bureau.

This report covers activities during 2008 and a brief snapshot of plans for 2009 and beyond. Despite economic gloom it is an exciting time for WLI, with plans afoot for increasing our membership and activities. WLI is a flagship project hosted by WWT, and is supported by HSBC until June 2009.

Martin Spray

CEO, WWT

Above: Martin Spray at WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre, Gloucestershire, UK.

Below: WLI Global Co-ordinator Chris Rostron.



Regional meetings

In September the WLI Global Co-ordinator attended the second meeting of the NorBalWet network in Oulu, Finland. The network comprises wetland experts from the Baltic and Nordic countries, including Russia. The network is largely kept active by the Finnish partners with commitment from the Finnish environment agency, and shows the importance of an active local partner.

The WLI Asia regional meeting took place in Suncheon, South Korea in October and brought together partners from countries as diverse as Japan, Russia, China, Indonesia, Pakistan and of course South Korea. The meeting was a chance to update each other on current projects, assess activity across WLI Asia over the last two years and make plans for the next two years. The WLI Global Co-ordinator is now formally taking on the administrative function, and we reached agreement on marketing, website management and a new committee structure. The next WLI Asia meeting will take place in October 2010 in Pakistan.



Ramsar and International NGO meeting

The Ramsar Convention of the Parties (COP) took place in Changwon, South Korea, and was preceded by an international NGO meeting attended by around 200 organisations, largely from South East Asia but also across the globe. WLI members took an active role in promoting CEPA and wetland centres, and a keynote speech on WLI and CEPA delivery was given at the conference. The WLI Global Co-ordinator also played a key role in establishing a new and complementary network of wetland organisations, the World Wetland Network (WWN), and is now the chair of this fledgling network. This network was established to maintain good communication between NGOs between Ramsar CoPs, and to facilitate mutual support in the preparation and development of their input to the Ramsar NGO statement. Work is currently taking place to develop this more formally, establishing the link with WWT.

At the Ramsar COP10, a side event was run to update colleagues on WLI activities and to obtain feedback on our plans for the next five years. Colleagues were keen to co-operate and gave a useful steer to guide the future development of WLI. This included advice on a new logo, request for more support for involving non-conservation partners, and suggestions for how the priority themes (see below) could be rolled out.

Above left: WLI Co-ordinator with colleagues at the Ramsar CoP. Left and below: Delegates at the World NGO conference, South Korea. Luc Hoogenstein. Below: The 10th Ramsar CoP, South Korea. Luc Hoogenstein



Priority themes

To help facilitate CEPA in key areas, members selected five areas of focus likely to be of use to a wide range of partners. They have been chosen on the basis of international applicability, the potential for multi-partner collaboration and project link-up. We intend to produce background information sheets, press release advice, activity sheets and case studies based around each area. These materials will be available on the web for members to download. The focal areas are:

- **World Wetlands Day** Supporting Ramsar's key wetland activities day and their annual theme, alongside the more general 'wise use of wetlands' theme.
- **World Water Day** UNESCO's call for more awareness of water resources, an ideal date to bring people's attention to wetland issues.
- **Migratory birds** World Migratory Birds day provides an excellent opportunity for engaging schools, families and naturalists in an exploration of the conservation issues faced by migratory wetland birds.
- **Invasive species** One of the major threats to biodiversity in wetlands in particular. Invasive non-native species can rapidly out compete native species and damage ecosystems.
- **Climate change** The overarching issue for us all. How does it affect wetlands? This area will explore the major role that wetlands play sequestering and locking up carbon, their role in reducing the impact of flood, storm and drought, and the ways in which they can help wildlife and people to adapt to the effects of climate change.



Some of these themes are date-specific, and tie in with existing initiatives. Others can be carried out at any time of year. We hope the resources will encourage members to get actively involved in whichever way suits them.

Marketing and outreach

We have been working on the website, keeping partner profiles current and including relevant resources. The website is due for a complete re-branding, to be completed in late February 2009. This will have a unique identity and branding, and will be much more interactive.

The current logo is also up for a rethink. It has served the project well, but is not universally popular. We are asking members to vote on some new logos, designed based on feedback from WLI members. The logo chosen by the members will then be used in our new website and marketing materials.

A WLI leaflet was also produced, which can be downloaded from the website. It was put together to be used at the Ramsar, WLI Asia and International NGO conferences, and 200 copies were distributed. The leaflet outlines the aims of the project and illustrates case studies from members across the globe.

The WLI Global Co-ordinator is currently working with partners at the Korean Wetlands Project to produce a World Ramsar book, showing examples of how different Ramsar sites across the world are managed. The book will have around 20 case studies, covering six continents, and will be produced in February 2009.

Survey work with partners

To develop better ways of servicing the needs of WLI members, they were asked to respond to e-mail questionnaires on two issues, communications and a skills audit. Feedback has usefully shaped our thinking and provided the basis of a skills-matching project.

The communications survey showed that WLI members find e-mail and website communication the most useful, and that the vast majority can access English (although we are aware that due to our current English-bias, this may under represent the need for other languages, in particular Spanish). Results indicated that some members in South East Asia cannot receive standard UK e-mail format, which must instead be sent as 'plain text', and that many members find large e-mails disruptive.

The skills audit indicated considerable variation in skills levels in specific CEPA areas across the network. This is an expected result, and could form the basis of a peer-mentoring scheme where those who are 'expert' either on certain issues or in certain forms of CEPA can support those in need of advice or training. It seemed, however, the capacity was relatively limited across the network in many areas not directly relating to CEPA, such as fund-raising, evaluation and the logistics of running a wetland centre.

Case Studies

Of the new members to have joined WLI, Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area and the Miyajimanuma Lake centre provide excellent examples of the different types of initiatives and wetland centres that can be supported by, and support, the WLI network. We define wetland centres as any site-based initiative that brings people into contact with wetlands, so members need not have any buildings at all. These two are both great examples of getting people inspired by wetlands and their wildlife.



Creston Valley, British Columbia, Canada

This site consists of 7,000 hectares (17,000 acres) of provincial land, or an area that averages 20 km (12.4) miles long by 3.4 km (2.1 miles) wide. It contains one lake (1,500 ha or 3,700 acres) and 17 marshes plus a major river and adjoining mountain slopes.



An Interpretation Centre, located within the wetland, offers educational displays, programs and events related to wetland science and management. Approximately 35,000 visitors per year utilize the trails, Interpretation Centre and other infrastructure for recreation, education, hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing. The Interpretation Centre is open May – October while access to trails and viewing towers is year round. To find out more, please visit www.crestonwildlife.ca.



Miyajimanuma Lake, Japan

This internationally important Ramsar site is a lake set in intensively managed agricultural land. It has large visiting populations of species such as the greater white-fronted goose, but is affected by diffuse pollution and human disturbance. The centre runs education activities for children and adults, monthly public awareness activities, and supports a local community volunteering initiative. It also supports a network of wetland education centres across the region of Okinawa, sharing information and best practice.



Member resources

As part of the website WLI members' strengths and expertise will be used to provide a set of resources that can be downloaded. Resource categories will include working with community groups and volunteers, schools and education activities, and running visitor centres. We also have a developing picture library, with images from partners that can be used for free as part of NGO CEPA work.

These resources will grow as the network becomes more active, and we anticipate that it will become a key resource for members, particularly new ones or those developing wetland centres.

Future work

Targets for the WLI Global Co-ordinator:

- To develop a distance learning course for international site-based environmental educators. The WLI Global Co-ordinator is working with partners including Botanic Gardens Conservation International, the Zoological Society of London, the Field Studies Council, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and two universities to put together a course, specifically aimed at site-based environmental staff, which will be accessible via the internet.
- To further build the WLI network of regional contacts, to increase the capacity of the network to actively engage in, promote and deliver wetland CEPA. Linked to this we have plans for regional meetings in North America, the Neotropics and Oceania.
- To actively develop key thematic areas, particularly to support WLI members in their CEPA work on the actions needed to tackle climate change, invasive species and to support migratory bird populations.
- To ensure that the new website facilitates and promotes increased member interaction and acts as a forum for better sharing of information and resources.

Finally, we need to obtain financial support for the continuation of WLI beyond 2009. The support of HSBC ends in the summer of 2009, and we urgently need to obtain support to sustain the continuation of the WLI initiative into the future.

The WLI secretariat and members from across the world are very grateful to the project's main donor, HSBC, for supporting WLI since 2004.

