



Wetland Link International

WWT The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Making a splash



The potential and practice of wetland centres

Wetland Link International

- is a global network of wetland education centres formed in 1991 by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT).
- was created in response to a growing need to help organisations and governments throughout the world in the development of education and public awareness initiatives at wetland sites.
- is endorsed by the Ramsar Convention.
- and supported by HSBC Bank plc.



Cover photo: Wetland Living exhibit building at WWT London Wetland Centre

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The World of wetland centres



Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre

It's a wet, wet, wet, wet world

Without wetlands, there is no water for life. 97% of the world's water is salty and oceanic. Of the remaining 3%, nearly all is frozen in polar regions or imprisoned underground. Most life – including human life – depends on 0.26% of global freshwater. This water is stored in wetlands from lakes and lagoons to marshes, ponds, pools, fens, bogs and rivers.



Roche Cairman Sanctuary

Wetlands store water and carbon. They filter and clean water. They mitigate against the effects of storms and floods. They stabilise shorelines and prevent coastal erosion. They are the source of numerous products, from food and fibre to fuel and pharmaceuticals. They are homes for a wealth of biodiversity. They reveal clues to historic and modern human cultures through archaeology. They are enormously productive and of immense economic, political, developmental and socio-cultural importance.



Environmental Concern main office

People need wetlands. Life needs wetlands. This is not always immediately apparent. City dwellers may not know, or consider how, their household water supply depends on local wetlands. Many people worldwide have to travel long distances for fresh, clean water. In some countries access to water is a major health and security issue.



Hong Kong Wetland Park

Wetlands disappear under development, drainage and pollution; underground aquifers recede with over consumption; species are lost; the combination of extreme weather and diminishing wetlands causes major flooding, affecting countries as diverse as Bangladesh, China, the USA and UK.

The solution depends on many things, but primarily on people. First, though, people must become aware and engaged with wetlands. They must be connected, concerned and competent to make informed decisions and take positive action for wetland environments.

This is where wetland centres come in.

Real value from real life



WWT Llanelli

Wetlands are a great conduit – a 'way in' – for exploring all sorts of topical environmental issues. These include basic ecological literacy, the conservation of species and habitats (biodiversity), and local/global water issues. Further, they are amphitheatres of experience where feelings, emotions and values are developed.

Wetland centres are prime vehicles for raising awareness, focusing experience and catalysing environmental action on behalf of wetlands.

There are several hundred wetland centres throughout the world. They range from embryonic, community-led initiatives in Lagos, Nigeria to high-tech, multi-media interactive exhibits in Hong Kong's International Wetland Park. Many are managed by non-government organisations (NGOs) like the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) with nine UK centres and Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) whose wetland centres include those at Karachi, Pakistan and Mai Po, Hong Kong.

Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve



Some are run by Governments like Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve by the Singapore Government's National Parks Board. A few are managed by NGOs for Government like Kota Kinabalu City Bird Sanctuary in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo.

Wetland centres may operate in partnership with other sectors. WWT's London Wetland Centre, UK, was developed by WWT, Thames Water (a public water company) and Berkeley Homes (a private housing developer). Point-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust in Trinidad is sited within a major petrochemical complex (Petrotrin). The Soonabai Pirojsha Godrej Foundation Mangrove Project is a public charitable Trust linked to M/s Godrej & Boyce Mfg. Co. Ltd., a multi-product Indian corporate.

WWT London Wetland Centre



Wetland centres—the people potential

The Wetlands Centre, Shortlands



Wetland centres bring people and wildlife together for the benefit of both. They offer major opportunities for CEPA (communication, education and public awareness) about wetlands; their biodiversity, functions and values. Globally, Wetland Centres provide numerous learning programmes for formal (school and university) and nonformal (the general public – adults and youth) audiences. Many have education staff and volunteers. At The Wetland Centre, Shortlands, Australia, a successful schools programme is run in partnership with the State Government (New South Wales) Department of Education and Training.

WWT Caerlaverock



Wetland centres provide amazing natural spectacles. They are wildlife havens, conservation centres, visitor attractions and ecotourism venues operated as sites for public learning, access to green space and biodiversity/heritage conservation. During the southern summer, over two million migratory shorebirds visit Australian wetlands on migration. Visitors to coastal wetland centres marvel at the diversity and sheer numbers. Most of the world Barnacle Goose population winters in and around WWT Caerlaverock, UK, on the banks of Scotland's Solway Firth.

WWT Martin Mere development



Cultural heritage is also a major feature of wetland centres. At WWT Martin Mere, UK, interpretation reveals the rich history of the Mere through biofacts and artifacts from Pleistocene mammals to Neolithic wooden trackways and Romano-Britain buried bog bodies. Pointe-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust, Trinidad, has an Amerindian Museum.

The sense of place engendered by immersion in a wetland centre can be a significant life experience leading to concern and care for the planet. Who could not be affected by the big skies of WWT Welney in eastern England's fenland; the haunting peat bog landscapes associated with Peatland World in Ireland's Bog of Allen; the tropical coastal paradise of Cousin Island in the Seychelles, and the majesty of Chesapeake Bay around the Horsehead Wetland Centre in the eastern USA?

Cousin Island Special Reserve



Wetland Centres offer unparalleled close encounters and access to secret worlds. Hidden cameras bring the breeding dramas of seabird colonies to the comfort of the Scottish Seabird Centre; Denmark's Aqua Ferskvands Aquarium is an inside-out aquarium with fresh views of grebes, otters and others; at Het Zwin, Belgium, you might come eyeball to eyeball with a White Stork; in the UK, Pond Zones at WWT Centres; in Japan, a wonderful museum at Lake Biwa; in Italy, the chance to stay in the middle of reedbeds and saltmarsh at the Caneo Visitor Centre near Trieste. At Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, Canada, visitors can canoe, ski cross-country, hike or snowshoe across the site during different seasons.

Connection to nature at wetland centres is stress relieving and spiritually uplifting. At WWT's London Wetland Centre, yoga groups and green gym members escape the stresses of city life. Everyday a host of urban dwellers walk, cycle and roller skate around the Costanera Sur Ecologica Reserve on the edge of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The health benefits of being around nature are only beginning to be understood.

Wetland centres link local communities to 'their' wetlands, encouraging ownership and stewardship. At Lake Elementeita, in Kenya's Rift Valley, a group of local people have built an Education Centre to encourage local engagement and environmental action around the flamingo-filled wetland.

Wetland centres may be a mixture of nature reserve, wilderness area, botanical garden, captive animal collection, garden, museum, science centre and cultural heritage site. They may be important wildlife and landscape features as part of the integrated management of urban water catchments. They are inclusive and offer access to all. In much of Europe, Australia and North America they offer exposure to real life in safe surroundings. This is vital where people are increasingly alienated from nature through prescriptive school-based curricula, health and safety fears, litigious societies, and the dominance of virtual media.



Wetland centres - policy and partners

Wetland Link International (WLI)

WLI is a global network of wetland centres. The network defines a wetland centre as “any place where there is interaction between people and wildlife, and CEPA activity occurs in support of wetland conservation”. Visit the WLI website at www.wli.org.uk

The WLI network embraces wetland nature and cultural heritage reserves with a wide range of visitor facilities (e.g. centres run by The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust – WWT), environmental education centres, field study centres, zoos and botanical gardens, interactive natural history museums and a wide variety of community site-based projects and programmes.

WLI developed from a range of wishes and desires. These included the wish to reduce feelings of isolation of those involved with on-the-ground CEPA activities; the wish to share knowledge and practical expertise; the wish to raise the profile and status of CEPA activity as part of conservation and sustainability objectives, and the desire to produce solutions.

WLI is coordinated by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), the UK’s largest NGO dedicated to international wetland conservation. The network is endorsed by the Ramsar Secretariat and supported by the HSBC Bank plc.

Visit www.wwt.org.uk and www.wwtlearn.org.uk for details.

WLI objectives

- To encourage and support the exchange of information and expertise internationally between those involved in wetland education programmes, particularly those operating from Wetland Education Centres, field study and environmental education centres, zoos and botanical gardens, and aquaria.
- To advocate for, and assist in, the development of new Wetland Education Centres and their associated programmes worldwide.
- To improve the effectiveness of operations at Wetland Education Centres by sharing expertise through training and exchange programmes.
- To lobby for the greater inclusion of CEPA programmes within wetlands and related conservation initiatives and instruments, and to support the development of frameworks for subsequent implementation at national, regional and global levels.

The Ramsar Convention and CEPA

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty providing the framework for countries to adopt local, regional and national actions and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. The Convention was launched at the Iranian town of Ramsar in 1971. Today, some 140 countries have joined Ramsar as Contracting Parties with nearly 1,400 wetland sites worldwide, totalling over 121 million hectares. For more information, visit www.ramsar.org

Ramsar Resolution V111.31 defines the CEPA Programme of the Convention which identifies wetland centres as key locations for promoting the principles of wetland conservation and wise use through CEPA activities.

The Programme also identifies the Wetland Link International (WLI) network as the key organisation to assist the Ramsar Contracting Parties in this area of work. For details, see Operational Objective 3.3 of the Resolution guidelines, www.ramsar.org/key_res_viii_31_e.htm

Can I join WLI?

WLI membership is site-based and open to any organisation, group or individual that is planning, designing or operating a place or places that conform to the definition of a Wetland Education Centre. Members may be Government, NGO, professional, amateur, paid or voluntary.

Benefits of membership

- You will become part of the international community of Wetland Education Centres – a network of several hundred over six continents. Details of specific Wetland Education Centres may be found on the WLI website 'WLI World' Global Directory, or by emailing the WLI Coordinator.
- An e-group to share ideas and expertise from Centre design and planning to specific programmes and events (like World Wetlands Day).
- A quarterly e-newsletter (can be sent by mail).
- Access to advice, support and expertise from the WLI Coordinator and membership.
- Opportunities for training, meetings and staff exchange, as the WLI Professional Development Programme progresses.
- Opportunities to participate in WLI Regional Networks as they develop. Currently there is a WLI Australia coordinated by The Wetlands Centre, Shortlands, and a WLI-UK, coordinated by WWT. Contact the WLI Coordinator for details.

How to join WLI

- Email the WLI Coordinator, wli@wwt.org.uk or write to The WLI Coordinator, The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, London Wetland Centre, Queen Elizabeth's Walk, Barnes, London SW13 9WT.
- Membership is free but you will be asked to submit a WLI site profile for inclusion on the www.wli.org.uk website 'WLI World Global Directory'.



The Soonabai Pirojsha Godrej Foundation (mangrove project)

Credit

Photos: WWT would like to thank the following for use of their imagery:

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Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve
Singapore

The Roche Caiman Sanctuary
Republic of Seychelles

The Soonabai Pirojsha Godrej Foundation
(Mangrove Project), India

The Wetlands Centre
Shortlands, Australia

Contact

The WLI Coordinator

The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, London Wetland Centre,
Queen Elizabeth's Walk, Barnes, London SW13 9WT, UK.
Email: wli@wwt.org.uk

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