



Wetland Link International (WLI) – Annual Report June 2005 – May 2006

Introduction to WLI

Wetland Link International (WLI), a programme of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) is a global network of wetland education centres. Founded in 1991, WLI has the following aims:

- 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 and similarly targeted sites such as field study centres, environmental education centres, zoological and botanical gardens, and aquaria.
- To advocate for, and assist in, the development of new wetland education centres and their associated programmes throughout the world.
- To improve the effectiveness of operations at wetland education centres through sharing, training and expertise exchange.
- To lobby for the greater inclusion of CEPA (communications, education and public awareness) 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.

Wetland centres are recognised by the Ramsar Convention on wetlands as a principal means of delivering CEPA for wetland conservation and wise use. The Ramsar Bureau encourages wetland centres to participate in WLI as a means of gaining access to global expertise in the field of wetland CEPA. This is written into the 2003-08 Ramsar CEPA Programme (operational objective 3.3.3).

WLI is coordinated by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), the UK's largest international wetland conservation organisation.

It is supported by HSBC Bank plc.

Introduction to the Annual Review

The Review period covers June 2005 – May 2006 to coincide with the project funding cycle. HSBC Bank plc has agreed to support WLI for a three-year-period from July 2004 – June 2007. This report covers the second year of the triennium.

WLI Membership and database

The WLI database was overhauled in 2004. Many old contacts were irrelevant or defunct. The completion of the analysis of old WWT records and Ramsar National Country Reports, plus better (e) communication and a higher profile, resulted in an active, targeted database currently standing at 310 members from 64 countries. This is roughly equivalent to the 2004 membership.

WLI members are mostly wetland education centres. A small number of members are key contacts with networks within the sector or at pan-organisational level where the organisation has multiple wetland centres (e.g. The Wildlife Trusts in the UK).

The geographical breakdown of WLI members is as follows:

Ramsar Region	Country	Wetland Centres	Totals
Africa	Botswana	1	
	Ghana	3	
	Kenya	2	
	Madagascar	1	
	Morocco	1	
	Nigeria	2	
	Senegal	1	
	Seychelles	1	
	South Africa	1	
	Tanzania/Zanzibar	2	
			10 countries, 15 centres
America	Canada	19	
	Mexico	1	
	USA	15	
			3 countries, 35 centres
Asia	Bangladesh	2	
	China	6	
	India	4	
	Iran	2	
	Israel	1	
	Japan	22	
	Korea	1	
	Malaysia	7	
	Mongolia	1	
	Pakistan	4	
	Palestine	1	
	Philippines	1	
	Russia	6	
	Singapore	1	
	Syria	1	
Taiwan	1		
Thailand	3		

			17 countries, , 64 centres
Europe	Austria	2	
	Belgium	3	
	Bulgaria	1	
	Cyprus	1	
	Czech Republic	1	
	Denmark	2	
	Eire	2	
	Finland	1	
	France	2	
	Germany	2	
	Greece	7	
	Italy	5	
	Latvia	1	
	Macedonia	1	
	Netherlands	1	
	Norway	1	
	Poland	1	
	Portugal	3	
	Slovakia	3	
	Slovenia	2	
	Spain	2	
	Sweden	3	
	Switzerland	1	
	UK	74	
			24 countries, 122 centres
Neotropics	Argentina	2	
	Brazil	25	
	Colombia	1	
	Ecuador	1	
	Nicaragua	1	
	Panama	1	
	Paraguay	1	
	Trinidad	1	
			8 countries,33 centres
Oceania	Australia	37	
	New Zealand	4	
			2 countries, 41 centres
		TOTAL	64 countries, 310 centres

WLI Support and profile materials

- An online manual – ‘Developing a Wetland Centre’ – was produced with a one-off grant of £10K from the UK Government through its Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The manual is freely downloadable from the WLI website and is available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and simple Chinese. Colleagues are translating the manual into Japanese and a local Russian school is translating it into Russian.

WLI and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is an international, inter-governmental Convention concerning wetlands, their conservation, sustainability and wise use. Wetlands of international importance are often designated as Ramsar sites and afforded appropriate protective legislation. See www.ramsar.org for details.
- WLI hosted a side event at the Ramsar COP held in Kampala, Uganda during November 2005. The COP is the triennial meeting of Ramsar Contracting Parties – in practice the Governments of various countries that have signed and ratified the Ramsar Convention (currently 152).
- Part of the side event involved the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) between WLI and Ramsar. The MOC recognises WLI as the key organisation worldwide for delivering CEPA for wetlands through wetland education centres. All Ramsar Contracting Parties are urged to have their wetland centres join WLI as a means of capacity building and sharing expertise.
- The MOC sets the context for Ramsar and WLI to work together in a more formal collaborative way in the future. It offers WLI the opportunity to influence the wetland CEPA programme of Ramsar during the next (and subsequent) triennia. – a huge potential influence on wetland CEPA globally as the Ramsar CEPA programme becomes subsumed into Government policy of Contracting Parties. To put this into perspective, the only other NGO (non-government organisation) partners of Ramsar are Birdlife, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), Wetlands International (WI) and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF).
- The WLI Coordinator has also joined the CEPA Specialist Group and Poverty/Sustainable Livelihood Groups of WI..
- The WLI Coordinator and WWT CEO are meeting with the Ramsar Secretariat in Gland, Switzerland, in June 2006 to discuss ongoing collaboration.

WLI Regional Networks

WLI-Australia

The WLI-Australia network – the first regional WLI network – started in 2002. It has developed a Communications Action Plan for Australian wetlands with Government support. During 2005/06, WLI has liaised with the network and is offering advice to the National Wetlands Trust of New Zealand regarding a planned wetland centre.

WLI- UK/Eire

The inaugural meeting of the WLI-UK/Eire regional network was held at the WWT London Wetland Centre in December 2004. About 30 delegates attended from UK/Irish wetland centres. WLI –UK currently has 74 members.

It is very rare to have a site/centre-based network (i.e. delivery on the ground) that has the potential to directly inform (and be informed by) Government policy. The WLI Coordinator will facilitate this as a member of the Education and Public Understanding Group of the England Biodiversity Strategy for the UK Government's Defra.

An Action Plan for wetland CEPA in the UK, drafted by WLI, was adopted by Defra in summer 2005.

WLI-Asia

WLI-Asia was formed at an inaugural workshop held at the WWF-Hong Kong Mai Po Wetland Centre, in June 2005. The network is facilitated by WWF-Hong Kong and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) of the Hong Kong Government.

The full report of the WLI-Asia exploratory workshop is available from www.wli.org.uk. As is the second WLI-Asia newsletter (May 2006).

Hong Kong Wetland Park opened to the public in May 2006. This is a 61 hectare site of recreated wetlands together with state-of-the-art interpretation including a 10Km² visitor centre. WLI and WWT played a considerable part in developing content and story lines for the interpretation. See www.wetlandpark.com for details.

The Mai Po Marketing Manager visited WWT/WLI in May/June 2006 for professional development. A WLI-Asia Asian Wetland Centre Conference, hosted by AFCD and WWF, is planned for Hong Kong in early 2007.

Other new Asian members include those from Iran, Pakistan and the Russian Far East where a new wetland centre is planned. WLI is part of a Darwin Initiative project on sustainable fisheries and wetland CEPA in Nepal, and part of an initiative to conserve the East Kolkata wetlands, India.

The WLI Coordinator visited the Ramsar Regional Centre for west and central Asia in Iran and undertook several training sessions about wetland CEPA for local ngos and teachers. He also participated, with the United Nations, Iranian, Afghan and UK Governments, in a World Wetlands Day Conference at Zabol, Iran.

WLI-Americas

WLI is in talks with the Ramsar Regional Centre for the western hemisphere in Panama to develop a pan-American WLI network with emphasis on central and south America and the Caribbean in the first instance. The British Embassy in Panama has provisionally offered support.

There is a growing correspondence from South America with recent interest expressed by wetland centres planned or existing in Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru.

Building a North American WLI regional network remains a priority for 2007 and beyond.

WLI- Europe

WLI and WWT Consulting have been working with a proposed wetland centre in Norway's Dokka Delta. The WLI Coordinator is delivering a keynote speech at a conference there in September 2006 where representatives from Norway, Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Latvia will attend. It is hoped that a Nordic-Baltic WLI Regional Network will develop from this meeting.

Similarly, WLI has been working with colleagues in Slovenian and Italian (Adriatic) wetland centres and a regional network is envisaged.

WLI and WWT Consulting are working on a proposed wetland centre development as well as CEPA training for colleagues from Alpiarda in Portugal.

The new Underwater World Ramsar Centre opened at Schrems Nature Park, Austria in April 2006. This is a long standing WLI member. Details from www.unterwasserreich.at

WLI website – www.wli.org.uk and e-group

The WLI website was overhauled in 2005. There is a more dynamic news section and a new area – the Resource Pool – which will build up into an online library of training and development materials for wetland CEPA professionals.

The WLI e-group continued to disseminate information and expertise throughout the global membership.

Visitors to WLI HQ (the WWT London Wetland Centre)

Much WLI work is advisory and conducted by email. However, many existing and potential WLI members visit the WWT London Wetland Centre and other WWT centres such as its headquarters at WWT Slimbridge, in Gloucestershire.

During the 2005-06 period, professional wetland CEPA visitors to WWT-WLI included colleagues from Bangladesh, China (Hong Kong and mainland), Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Pakistan, Portugal, Russia, UK and the USA.

Future work

During the 2006-07 cycle, WLI aims to :

- Agree a programme of further collaboration with the Ramsar Convention following the MOC..
- Grow WLI membership, especially via Regional Ramsar centres and now that the Neotropical region is showing much interest.
- Facilitate the growth and development of regional networks including possible new networks in Nordic-Baltic and Mediterranean/Adriatic Europe, Africa, and parts of the Americas.
- Especially develop the WLI UK-Eire network.
- Facilitate the Asian wetland centre conference in Hong Kong.
- Develop wetland CEPA training and development materials for online use. Work with regional hubs to incorporate CEPA into existing wetland management training courses and centres (e.g. in Hong Kong, Iran and Panama).
- Continue to advise and liaise with members worldwide on a daily basis.
- Work with other HSBC projects to find synergies. For example, there are examples of wetland and environmental education projects supported by HSBC that WLI already liaises with (WWF Malaysia; WWF Hong Kong; WWF-UK Freshwater Programme in Brazil, China, USA, Mexico and UK etc.; Botanic Gardens Conservation International).
- Develop a proposal to grow WLI into a sustainable division of WWT. HSBC support has been integral to the reconstitution of the network to a stage where we can take a much larger and strategic developmental leap forward.

The WLI Coordinator, on behalf of WWT, thanks HSBC Bank plc for their continued support, without which WLI would not have become the major player in global wetland education centre networks. Thanks are also due to Defra for funding the

manual, to Ramsar officers (especially Secretary General Peter Bridgewater and CEPA Officer Sandra Hails), and to all WLI members.

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