

WLI Annual Report 2015



1. Introduction

Dear WLI Colleague,

WLI was set up 25 years ago with the intention of supporting wetland centres and those that work in them, based around a model of cooperation between centres and coordination from WWT. I'm pleased to report, that we have made good progress in 2015, with now over 300 wetland centre members, and active regional networks covering the globe. A great example of this saw the WLI Russia and WLI North America networks cooperating to carry out an exchange programme. Six centres took part, and feedback from participants showed that the visits had been immensely rewarding at both a personal and professional level.



The WLI Asia meeting took place in Thailand, with nearly 50 participants and working closely with the Ramsar Regional Centre East Asia (RRC-EA) and the East Asia Australasia Flyway Partnership. This structure works very well, and we are in the process of formalising the relationship with the RRC-EA to take a lead role in the development of WLI Asia. Similarly, we are changing the structure of WLI in North and South America, to create WLI Americas. This fits nicely with the flyway, with partners such as Ramsar and WHSRN (Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network) and we hope will create good momentum from across the partners.

Finally, the Migratory Birds for People network (wetland centres along the East Atlantic Flyway) took a step forward with improved communication with colleagues in West Africa at the recent AEWA (African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement) meeting. Good to have active centres in the region.

I hope you enjoy reading this report, and please do see the website for more details on what our partners are up to, and how WLI continues to support wetland centres across the globe. My thanks to all the WLI members and partners that continue to make the network such as success.

Best regards,

Martin Spray CBE,
Chief Executive, WWT

2. Resources

2.1 WLI web pages and social media

The web site acts as our key point of communication for partners, with updated news and information regularly added. Using a WordPress based system allows us to easily update the site, whilst also giving administrative rights to partners, particularly useful for different language versions. We have had a lot of help particularly with the Arabic version of the site, and thank our colleagues from the UAE for their input.

The Facebook audience continues to grow and we now have around 600 'likes' to our WLI page. We also have an MBP page (the East Atlantic flyway network of wetland centres), and also a twitter account for WLI, @wetlandlink. Although we have limited staff resources to post stories and issues, we use the Facebook page at least weekly, and the twitter account during events or activities where appropriate (for example during the Ramsar COP12).



Diawling National Park, Mauritania, is our first member to join with an Arabic profile. A great addition to the network with 16,000ha of reserve, working with local schools and ecotourism. See [website](#) for more.

2.2 Updates and bulletins

Regular updates were produced during 2015, which are sent to our partners via MailChimp, an e-mail distribution system. Recently we have changed the format to allow partners to click directly to news stories on the website, which has seen more active readership. The bulletins are also produced in French and Spanish, thanks to partners and volunteers across the network.

The six monthly WLI bulletin provides a more in-depth set of stories from partners, and is a useful format to give more detail.

We also use it to share best practice from other sources relevant to CEPA at wetland sites. There is also a regular MBP newsletter that is produced for the East Atlantic flyway network, largely put together by our colleagues within the network.



As part of World Migratory Bird Day, the MBP project partners produced a leaflet on 'Bird-friendly energy', based on best practice at centres.

3. Ramsar, AEWA and WLI

The 12th Conference of the Ramsar parties, COP12, took place in Punta del Este, Uruguay, and saw WWT becoming the 6th IOP, or International Organisation Partner. In addition, a new CEPA resolution was adopted, including reference to the WLI network and the importance of wetland centres. The WLI manager is part of the CEPA oversight panel, and had inputted to the development of the new CEPA resolution.



WWT colleagues Martin Spray, Debbie Pain and Chris Rostron after the announcement that WWT is officially a Ramsar IOP

We worked with partners including the Environmental Ecosystem Research Foundation to hold a side event at the COP, with partners attending to present on the networks in each of the regions around the world.

Whilst in Uruguay, we also worked closely with local stakeholders to advise on the local Maldonado wetlands. The enthusiasm of local people to protect and promote enjoyment of their wetlands was impressive, and we hope that they will achieve their plans to create a new wetland centre, but also to find a solution for the water quality issues impacting on their wetlands.



Head of WLI with West Africa partners at the AEWA MOP, November 2015

In late 2015 the WLI manager attended part of the 6th AEWA MOP (Meeting of the Parties for the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement). We have been working in collaboration for some time with the communications unit of AEWA, in particular on promoting the Migratory Birds for People (MBP) Project. The MOP6 also gave us an opportunity to promote the MBP project, linking wetland centres along the East Atlantic Flyway. We showed the draft version of the film, which was well received.

In addition we took the opportunity to meet with West Africa partners that were present. Despite the busy agenda, this was a great time to develop ideas and relationships with regional partners and those working at wetland centres. We produced a workplan and arranged a tele-meeting for early 2016.

4. Regions

4.1 Europe and Africa

We have grouped Europe and Africa, largely due to the work along the East Atlantic Flyway as part of the Migratory Birds for People (MBP) network. This network has been running since 2009, and continues to act as a strong core group of wetland centres along the flyway. The annual meeting this year took place at the Urdaibai Bird Center, Basque Country, and brought together colleagues from across Europe and Russia. With funding from the Natura 2000 network, our Basque partners hosted an excellent meeting, and covered topics from wetlands and tourism, their international osprey reintroduction project and even how to create a 'do it yourself' display screen linked to a telescope. For more information, see the MBP website at www.migratorybirdsforpeople.org.

MBP has also produced two newsletters, coordinated by our Dutch partners, and created a Facebook site which is administered by our core partners. We also produced guidance for World Migratory Birds day on Energy and Migratory Birds, based on case studies from across the network and sent to all partners prior to the event. The document showed examples of the impact on wild birds of different types of energy source, and how centres have tried to reduce these impacts through practical measures.

As mentioned above, working through AEWA we have established good contacts with our West African colleagues, and plan to develop the network of centres as MBP West Africa. Challenges around language (French, Portuguese, English) and internet connections remain an issue, but we are continuing to improve how we engage with them.



Some of the MBP group at the Urdaibai Estuary, Basque Country

Finally, we are working with our Dutch partners to develop a European level bid on raising awareness of the importance of wetlands for migratory birds. Partners in Spain are also developing a 'wetlands and tourism' project along the flyway, to be launched in early 2016.

Russia. Thanks to the Russia-US exchange project, ideas and relationships have been developing amongst the Russian partners. The WLI Website is available in Russian, and several of our Russian colleagues now have administrative rights to the website. WLI has been promoted amongst government meetings on protected areas and is gaining support. We have a workplan, and hope to hold a WLI Russia meeting in 2016.

4.3 The Americas

Working closely with our colleagues at the Wetlands Institute, New Jersey, we supported submission of the Peer to Peer project, aiming to develop an exchange programme between the US and Russia. The second attempt was successful and we have been working with three Russian wetland centres and three in the US to carry out exchange visits, and develop a manual on best practice for wetland centre staff.

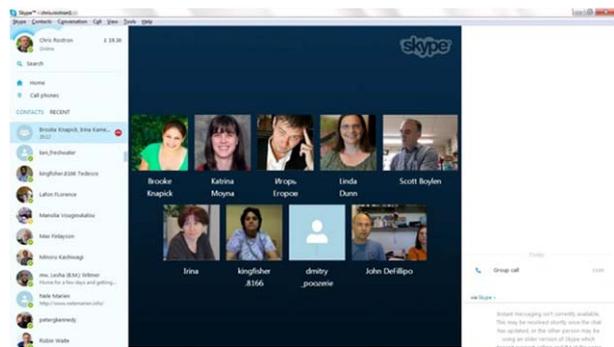
The exchange visits were very successful, with partners from each centre learning a lot about the different ways of involving and engaging people in wetlands through visitor centre design, interpretation and activities. The final conference took place at the Wetlands Institute, with all the partners coming together for five days of work and preparation of the wetland manual.

For the Americas more generally, we have spent a lot of time working with partners separately in North and South America, and have come to realise that it may be time to combine the two. This would also allow us to work more closely with the WHSRN (Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network) on flyway issues. Partners are keen to see this approach, so we will work to combine the networks over 2016.

4.4 Asia / Oceania

WLI Asia continues to work closely with the Ramsar Regional centre East Asia (RRC-EA) EAAFP (East Asia Australasia Flyway Partnership), Wetlands International China, and key local wetland centres from across the region. Working with these partners and the Thai Government, we organised the 5th WLI Asia meeting, which took place in Bangkok, Thailand. With 50 participants, the meeting was a great opportunity to share experience and best practice, bring in external speakers from Ramsar, WWF and IUCN, and plan for the future of WLI Asia.

Key conclusions from the planning workshop include the need for proper evaluation of CEPA activities at wetland sites, the opportunity to develop the WLI Asia network through the RRC-EA, and a need for an updated audit of the existing WLI members. We would also like to do more to develop a Chinese WLI network, and are working with Wetlands International China to achieve this.



Regular Skype meetings formed the basis for preparations for exchange visits between staff in US and Russian wetland centres.



5th WLI Asia Conference, Thailand

5. Future planning for 2016

In 2016 we are keen to start a new WLI international steering group, which will include representatives from the Ramsar convention, local wetland centres, wetland education networks and regional initiatives. This is long overdue, and will be a great addition to guiding and supporting the WLI programme. We will also carry out a

comprehensive review of WLI members to find out firstly what types of activities and facilities they have, but also what types of support they need from WLI. This was highlighted at the WLI Asia meeting, and so you will receive a request for information soon.

Finally, we are keen to progress with our regional initiatives, including the new 'WLI Americas' network, MBP West Africa and WLI Asia. The network thrives on the enthusiasm and hard work of its members, and these regional initiatives are key to its success. We will also be working through WWT's Flight of the Swans project, based around the journey of a paramotorist colleague flying the entire Bewick's swan flyway from the Arctic circle down to the UK.



MBP core planning group, Netherlands

6. Contacts

For more information on WLI, please contact

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The WLI network is coordinated
by WWT



WLI is recognised as a key implementer
of the Ramsar CEPA programme