



Wetland Link International Annual Report 2007



Introduction

Overview of 2007

Wetland Link International (WLI) is a global network of wetland centres engaged in CEPA (communication, education and public awareness) for the sustainability and wise use of the world's wetlands. It is operated by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), a UK-based environmental nongovernment charity dedicated to the worldwide conservation and wise use of wetlands.

WLI is a global community serving to:

- Exchange expertise and information among members.
- Support and assist new and established wetland centre developments, best operating practice and capacity building initiatives for wetland-related CEPA.
- Lobby for the inclusion of CEPA within wetland initiatives and policies worldwide.

WLI is recognised by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands as a key organisation to help wetland education centres and Ramsar Contracting Parties to deliver CEPA for wetlands. This is written into the Ramsar triennial CEPA Action Plan and reaffirmed in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between WLI and Ramsar.

Membership of WLI is free and reflects a broad church of CEPA initiatives for wetlands that includes classic visitor centres in protected areas, community-based conservation and development projects, CEPA initiatives in larger ecosystem level programmes; and public aquaria, zoos, botanical gardens and museums that feature exhibitions about wetlands. Members are from both government, nongovernment and private sectors.

The WLI network is generously supported by HSBC Bank plc.

2007 was the year where WLI really came into its own. There has been a 15% increase in members since 2006 with the total standing at 350 from 75 countries in six continents at the end of 2007.

WLI works through a number of regional networks, of which there were a significant proliferation in 2007.

The WLI-Asia network really took off with its first symposium, website and inter-country schools programme.

WLI-Australia, the first regional network to be established, was reinvigorated during a conference in Australia during the autumn.

WLI UK/Eire needs growing and revitalising at the membership level. However, there were active moves to revise the UK Government Wetland CEPA Action Plan for the UK in advance of the next global Ramsar meeting (COP 10), scheduled for the Republic of Korea in October, 2008.

A new embryonic network, WLI-Canada, was formed later in the year.

During 2007, the success of WLI was recognised by WWT and elevated to a full Unit within CEO's office.

A WLI 'futures' paper was written for discussion by stakeholders including WWT staff, WLI members, critical friends, partners and HSBC. WLI objectives were agreed for 2007 and 2008 in line with WWT strategic priorities.

WLI continues to be generously supported by HSBC Bank with funding agreed until mid 2008. It is hoped that the relationship with HSBC will continue after this date. This is especially pertinent as HSBC launched its Climate Partnership Programme in 2007. Whilst WLI is not one of HSBC's Climate Partners, the network (and the wider WWT) is working closely with two of the partners (Earthwatch, WWF) on a number of strategic initiatives linking climate change to wetlands and offering environment-based volunteering opportunities for HSBC staff.



WLI Regional Networks

WLI-Asia

WLI-Asia is admirably facilitated by the Hong Kong Government's Department for Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation and the Worldwide Fund for Nature Hong Kong.

Both facilitators organised the first WLI-Asia symposium, held at the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP) in January, 2007. This was sponsored by a number of groups including HSBC and Cathay Pacific. Over 80 delegates (rising to 120 with dignitaries etc.) attended from a dozen Asian countries, Australia, Kenya and the UK. The Ramsar Convention was represented by the Secretary-General and the Head of CEPA. WWT/WLI was represented by WWT's Chief Executive, Martin Spray, and Malcolm Whitehead. There was high level political representation from both Hong Kong and Beijing. Symposium presentations are available on a dedicated WLI-Asia website and were circulated on CD to delegates.

Four WLI-Asia newsletters were published and circulated throughout the year. The website, www.wli-asia.org was launched.

WWT London Wetland Centre and the HKWP entered into a twinning agreement. The first staff exchange

took place in December with two HKWP staff (interpretation and volunteer management) visiting WWT London. Both centres are working on a joint mobile display to promote the twinning.

WWT/WLI entered into a five-year formal agreement with the Office of Wetland Conservation Management of the State Forestry Administration of the Government of P.R. China. This is the Chinese Government Ramsar implementing authority. The agreement was signed in Beijing in November and formalises the intention for all parties to share ideas and expertise to improve the capacity for best practice in wetland conservation and wise use.

www.wli-asia.org

WLI UK/Eire

The Head of WLI, Malcolm Whitehead, was appointed as the Ramsar Convention CEPA nongovernment organisation (ngo) focal point for the UK (the Government focal point is the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – Defra).

Right: Martin Spray, WWT CEO, signs agreement with Professor Ma Guangren, Office of Wetland Conservation Management, Government of P.R. China.

Below: Drying fish at Koshi Tappu, Nepal.

WLI worked with Defra to revise the draft of the Wetland CEPA Action Plan for the UK in advance of the next Ramsar Council of Contracting Parties (COP).

Meetings of the Defra N2K Forum were also attended. This was an opportunity for ngos to influence Government policy with reference to the Ramsar Convention as well as other European environmental legislation (specially the European Union (EU) Birds and Habitats Directives).

From this came the wish for WLI, and WWT, to advise Government on wetland-related matters in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. A meeting to discuss this is scheduled for early 2008.

WLI attended a meeting of the Education and Public Understanding group of the England Biodiversity Strategy coordinated by Defra to harmonise CEPA initiatives for both the Conventions on Biological Diversity and on Wetlands (Ramsar).



WLI Regional Networks

WLI was present at a symposium about coastal wetland management in Suncheon, Republic of Korea, in May. A presentation was given and talks were held with the Korean Federation of Environmental Movements, the forthcoming new facilitators of WLI-Asia. It is proposed to hold a second WLI-Asia symposium in Korea in the spring of 2008, and a WLI-Asia-related event at the Ramsar COP in Korea during October 2008.

The Head of WLI visited Koshi Tappu Ramsar site in Nepal as part of a WWT-led Darwin Initiative project. The project is helping local fishing communities and villagers to develop sustainable livelihood options that improve their health and wellbeing, as well as reducing pressure on the biodiversity of the site. A learning agenda was prepared in consultation with stakeholders.

Advice was given to a proposed wetland centre in the Philippines and a visit was made to the Sungei Buloh wetland centre in Singapore (a WLI founder member).

Right: Trumpeter Swans at Wye Marsh Wetland Centre, Ontario, Canada. Wye Marsh facilitates WLI-Canada.

Below: Magpie Geese at Hunter Wetland Centre, New South Wales, Australia. Hunter Wetland Centre facilitates WLI-Australia.

WLI-Australia

WLI-Australia was the first WLI regional network. During October, Martin Spray and Malcolm Whitehead visited the Hunter Wetland Centre Australia (HWCA) in Newcastle, New South Wales, to present papers and lead discussions at a national-level Wetland Innovations symposium.

The symposium offered the opportunity to resurrect WLI-Australia which will be facilitated by HWCA (itself a WLI founder member). A paper about WLI-Australia written in 2000 is to be circulated to a newly reinvigorated membership and revised following comments. WLI-Australia will also work at the national government level to prepare a Wetland CEPA Action Plan for Australia in advance of the Ramsar COP in 2008.



WLI-Canada

WLI-Canada was a new regional network formed in 2007. In August, The Head of WLI visited Wye Marsh Wetland Centre in Midland, Ontario. He also visited a number of wetland sites and spoke to a local Rotary Club. Wye Marsh has agreed to facilitate WLI-Canada and will set up a tele-conference with other wetland centres. It has already made contact with HSBC.

A formal letter launching WLI-Canada and Wye Marsh as the facilitator was signed by the President of Wye Marsh, the Wye Marsh CEO, Martin Spray and Malcolm Whitehead in September.

The Board President of Wye Marsh visited WWT London in December.

Europe

Although not a formal WLI regional network, WLI was active in Europe during 2007.

In January, WLI visited wetland centres around Marano Lagoon in coastal northeast Italy. Advice was given about CEPA and ecotourism. Later in 2007 a party of WWT volunteers from WWT London visited the area as an ecotourist group.

WLI advised the proposed Dokka Delta Wetland Centre, Norway, and colleagues in Latvia about disabled visitor access to wetland centres and sites.



HSBC Climate Partnership

In 2007, HSBC, the sponsors of WLI, launched a five-year \$100 million Climate Partnership Programme to tackle issues of climate change. The partners are Earthwatch Institute, The Climate Group, Smithsonian Tropical Forest Institute and WWF.

HSBC has asked WLI and the wider WWT (themselves not Climate Partners) to work strategically with the Partnership.

To date, this has meant offering an environmental-based volunteering programme for HSBC employees at UK WWT centres in partnership with Earthwatch. During 2007, a total of 107 HSBC employee volunteers undertook various practical conservation projects, including pond and wildfowl pen clearing and restoration, and wetland boardwalk maintenance, at four UK WWT centres (Arundel, West Sussex – 25 volunteers, Llanelli, Carmarthenshire – 34, Martin Mere, Lancashire – 28, and Slimbridge, Gloucestershire – 20). All volunteers were given briefing packs and attended talks and/or guided walks that emphasised wetland conservation messages and the values of wetlands in mitigating against adverse effects of climate change. At least 51 other HSBC employees visited WWT centres in 2007.

There is the intention to expand this programme, both at UK WWT centres and to targeted cities worldwide using WLI members and their sites. Already, a mangrove site in Mumbai and both HKWP and the Mai Po Marshes in Hong Kong have expressed interest in undertaking the volunteer programme.

WWT/WLI is also working with WWF on targeted cities and river systems within the Climate Partnership brief. This will include developing interpretation about the Climate Partnership and the links between climate change and wetlands at planned and existing wetland centres in Shanghai, Mumbai and London.

The Head of WLI attended an exhibition of 'Rivers of the World' as part of the Mayor of London's Thames River Festival in September. This was sponsored in part by the HSBC Global Education Trust and the British Council.

www.hsbccommittochange.com/environment/climate-partnership

Communications and Publications

The WLI website was revised and launched as part of the revamped WWT website, www.wwt.org.uk/wli.

A WLI column (the Good Wetland Guide) was launched in the WWT membership magazine, 'Waterlife'.

A paper about WLI was published in 2007 in the 2004 Proceedings of the Edinburgh Symposium: Waterbirds around the World (ed. Boere G., Galbraith C., Stroud D., The Stationery Office, Edinburgh, UK).

Malcolm Whitehead also contributed to the CEPA guidelines for the Convention of Biological Diversity and similar for the Ramsar Convention. This was also as a member of the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication.

Below left: First WLI-Asia symposium held at Hong Kong Wetland Park, January 2007.



Visitors to WLI at WWT London in 2007

Representatives visited WLI from the following:

Government of China (Office of Wetland Conservation Management, State Forestry, Administration, P.R. China).

Government of Hong Kong (AFCD, HKWP).

Government of Hong Kong (Director of HK Economic and Trade Office in London)

Government of Korea (local Government)

Government of Singapore (Sungei Buloh Wetland Centre)

Hunter Wetland Centre, Australia

Pearson, David (acknowledged 'green guru' of architecture).

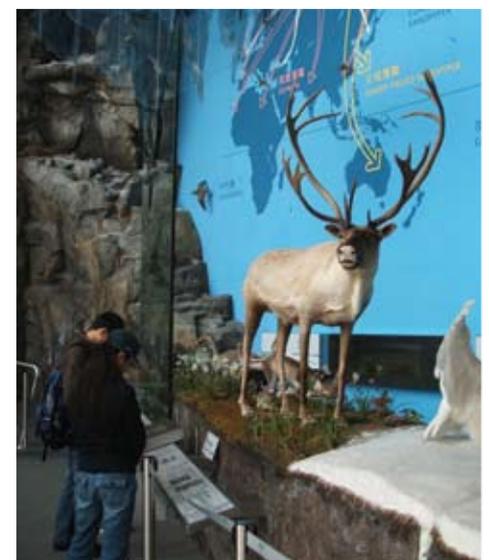
Save Brasil (Brazilian Bird Life partner).

Travis Wetland Centre, Christchurch, New Zealand

WWF Pakistan

WWF UK

Below Right: Hong Kong Wetland Park.



The Future

2007 saw the departure of Malcolm Whitehead from the position of Head of WLI. He has been instrumental in the development of the network and his enthusiasm will be missed.

A replacement for this position will be sought in early 2008. This change of staff is being welcomed as an opportunity to assess WLI's successes and failures and to look at how we plan to develop WLI in the future. To initiate this process the following aims have been identified:

- Proactive strategic network development
- Linking flyway members
- Support existing initiatives (e.g. Wings over Wetlands)
- Focus on areas of greatest need (threatened sites, species and communities)
- Assess member's CEPA strengths, needs, wetland issues faced and conservation/wise use barriers
- Develop tools to assess the efficacy of different types of CEPA at delivering conservation and sustainability objectives
- Use needs assessment and best practice to develop appropriate training programme
- Increase engagement with HSBC Climate Partnership
- Develop and promote innovative CEPA techniques to minimise CO2 emissions
- Fundraise for full programme implementation

These aims will be delivered through four WLI initiatives that will focus on:

- Flyways
- Threatened species
- Climate change
- Wise wetland use

More details about these will be published in 2008.

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