

# Forests for water and wetlands

## Title

Today is World Wetlands Day and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands, which was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar on 2 February 1971. Over the last four decades the Ramsar Convention has had a huge positive impact on how wetlands are valued, managed and conserved around the world. The BirdLife Partnership is proud to be working in support of the Convention, as one of its International Organisation Partners. BirdLife Partners are working actively at all levels to fulfil the main objectives of Ramsar. From assisting the implementation and development of national legislation to training, field research, water resources planning, awareness-raising and site management on-the-ground, Partners are promoting the conservation and wise use of wetlands, not only those already included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance but the many other Important Bird Areas that would qualify as Ramsar sites. In 2011, the United Nations 'International Year of Forests', World Wetlands Day has the theme 'Forests for water and wetlands'. Indeed, these two important habitat types are closely linked. Forests form the water catchment for many important wetlands, and many kinds of forests are wetlands too. Often less high-profile are the mangroves that protect coastlines and underpin commercial fisheries in many parts of the world. These extremely important, but neglected and poorly protected forested wetlands, need much more conservation attention. The Ramsar Convention has played a central role in the conservation and protection of wetlands. Thanks to Ramsar, the importance of wetlands for water, for wildlife, for livelihoods and for storing carbon is increasingly widely recognised. However, there is much more still to do. Many internationally important sites are not yet designated under Ramsar. There is a close overlap between BirdLife's Important Bird Area (IBA) Programme and the Convention's work. At national level, many BirdLife Partners are advancing the designation of wetland IBAs that meet Ramsar's criteria with their respective governments. While we celebrate Ramsar's 40th anniversary and the World Wetlands Day, we also need to recognise that wetlands face big and ever-increasing threats, which can lead to their diverse and substantial values being lost for ever. BirdLife Partners are actively involved in defending the most urgently threatened sites, informing the national and international communities; reporting ecological changes in wetlands, and carrying out impact assessment, among others. A good example of how BirdLife is working in projects around the world to conserve and restore degraded forest ecosystems is the work carried out by Panamá Audubon Society (BirdLife in Panama). They have provided wetland management training to Local Conservation Groups in the Upper Bay of Panamá. Mangrove restoration, as part of an integrated coastal management plan, has contributed to local poverty alleviation by improving fish, molluscs and other mangrove forest resources. This strengthening of local capacities, together with network and advocacy training (e.g. to influence government into legislative reform that controls exploitation), provides a basic platform from which to start designing self-help sustainable development that will help maintain ecosystem services and reduce vulnerability to climate change. With 160 Parties now signed up to the Convention, effective

implementation at the national level is vital. This will take an urgent and concerted effort from *all* stakeholders, including civil society. BirdLife Partners are already working actively at wetlands across the world ? more Governments should recognise this role and involve Partners in national wetland committees, plans and actions. We can make a real difference by working together. State of the World's Birds Links:

- **Spotlight on wetlands**
- **Spotlight on forests**