

Title Amid the vast echoing marble halls of the Parliamentary Palace in Bucharest, the Eleventh Conference of Parties of the Ramsar Convention closed last Friday 13 July on a positive note. As expected, the issue of institutional hosting of the Secretariat overshadowed much of the meeting and ate away at the time available for other negotiations. Parties eventually avoided a divisive vote and agreed to renew their confidence in IUCN as the host, while working between now and COP12 to address some key issues such as the Convention's working languages and the need for a high-level political segment at the COP. In the backwash of the recent Rio+20 summit, COP11 demonstrated Ramsar's relevance to sustainable development by approving a set of important resolutions related to energy, health, agriculture, poverty eradication, tourism, avoiding and compensating for wetland loss, climate change and public and private investment. BirdLife was represented by Partners from Belarus, Japan, Myanmar, Spain and the UK, as well as the Secretariat and the Societatea Ornitologica Romana (SOR; BirdLife in Romania), who were present at the BirdLife exhibition stand throughout the COP. With Wetlands International and the East Asia-Australasia Flyway Partnership, BirdLife held a successful side event to highlight the [rapid loss of tidal flats](#) along the East Asia-Australasia Flyway, especially critical stopover sites for migratory waterbirds. This led to constructive dialogue with several Asian countries about future cooperation to stop tidal flat destruction. At the side event, the Myanmar government announced their decision to list tidal wetlands of the Gulf of Martaban as a Ramsar Site, while the Thai government committed to support further exchange of management experience from the Inner Gulf of Thailand. Both these sites are crucial wintering grounds for the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed sandpiper. Following up these discussions, BirdLife hopes to help organize a workshop related to tidal flat conservation in China, North Korea and Myanmar. Along with the other International Organization Partners (IOPs) to Ramsar, BirdLife welcomed the COP decision to adopt a new Ramsar Site Information Sheet – a major step in bringing Ramsar's data collection and management up to date. COP also agreed to set up a review of delivery, uptake and implementation of scientific and technical advice and guidance to the Convention. Ramsar's Scientific and Technical Review Panel is noted for its high-quality work, but implementation of its findings and guidance on the ground has so far been very patchy. This is an area where BirdLife's national Partners can do much to [support Governments](#). Less encouragingly, Parties decided to freeze the current Secretariat budget, with no increase for 2013, which will put the severely stretched Secretariat team under extra pressure. In a [closing statement](#), the IOPs stressed that the wetlands that were under threat at the start of the meeting – [such as Panama Bay](#) – remained under threat at the end. It is up to Parties now to ensure that the Convention, including this newest raft of resolutions, is actually implemented effectively at national level.