

Spare a thought for water on World Wetlands Day!

Title

Today, Saturday 2nd February, is **World Wetlands Day!** A day when we should all pause for at least a moment to think and remind ourselves of the vital role they play in supporting life and helping people's livelihoods. The theme for this year is *Wetlands and Water Management*. Put simply, **wetlands take care of water**. They act like sponges, soaking up excess water and storing it for when the weather is dry. They are therefore perfect natural flood defences and reservoirs that support the lives of millions of people. Wisely using our wetlands is an essential component of the delivery of sustainable water management. World Wetlands Day marks the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the **Ramsar Convention**) on 2nd February 1971 at the Iranian city of Ramsar. The 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. "The Ramsar Convention has played a central role in the conservation and protection of wetlands," said Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife Director of Science and Policy. "Thanks to Ramsar, the importance of wetlands for water, for wildlife, for livelihoods and for storing carbon is increasingly widely recognised. There is much more still to do and World Wetlands Day helps focus us all on the importance of wetlands for all life on earth."



Wetlands provide sustainable livelihoods to women at Nyabarongo in Rwanda, shown here weaving Papyrus. Photo: David Thomas.

Wetlands **benefit people and wildlife in all manner of ways**. The BirdLife Partner in Rwanda, ACNR, has worked on conserving the Nyabarongo wetlands Important Bird Area (IBA) as well as benefitting local people whom depend on these wetlands for their livelihoods. Papyrus, which grows at the wetlands, provides a sustainable source of income to local women who weave the plant into handicrafts such as baskets and ceiling panels.



Mangrove planting in Cambodia celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Photo: Bou Vorsak; BirdLife International - Cambodia Programme.

From field research to training, from water resources planning to site management, BirdLife Partners around the world are working for wetlands. "BirdLife is especially active in 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," said Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife Director of Science and Policy. 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.



World Wetlands Day celebratory comic from www.ramsar.org

Another service wetlands provide is recreation, go and get your feet wet at your local wetland today!