

Title The 11th Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (themed 'Wetlands: home and destination') opens today in Bucharest, Romania, where for the next 10 days the Convention's 162 Contracting Parties gather to advance the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. As one of five International Organization Partners (IOPs) to the Convention, BirdLife has strong and long-standing links with [Ramsar](#). Many wetland Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are current or potential 'Ramsar sites' - Wetlands of International Importance designated under the Convention. COP11 takes place in the shadow of the Rio+20 summit, where the world's governments failed to make real progress on meeting pressing global challenges. The huge disappointment of Rio+20 might make Ramsar, brought into being during an earlier and more optimistic era of international negotiation, seem an irrelevance. In fact, the Convention has much to offer as a model of the collective approach needed to achieve sustainable development - with the intergovernmental system, national governments, local government, civil society and business working together, from a strong scientific foundation. The concept of 'wise use' enshrined in the convention directly addresses the issue of sustainability. While the theme of this COP is wetlands, tourism and recreation, the 21 draft resolutions for negotiation are focused strongly on challenging sustainable development issues - including poverty, health, climate, the energy sector and responsible investment. Also on the table is a proposed 'Integrated Framework and guidelines for avoiding, mitigating and compensating for wetland losses'. BirdLife will be using the COP to highlight the threats to key wetlands from ill-considered 'development' that focuses only on short-term benefits. An IUCN Situation Analysis to be launched at this meeting warns of the imminent extinctions of species (notably migratory shorebirds) and collapse of crucial ecological services in East and South-east Asian tidal flats, especially around the Yellow Sea. Rapid reclamation is causing the disappearance of these habitats, which provide crucial refuelling sites for waterbirds on migration and crucial ecological infrastructure for people. BirdLife will also be voicing concerns about the Bay of Panama wetlands. This Ramsar site is the most important staging area for migratory shorebirds in the entire Americas, with [mangrove forests](#) that play a vital role in supporting fisheries and protecting Panama City from floods. With its Protected Area status recently suspended for technical legal reasons, and controls on mangrove cutting and in-fill relaxed, survival of the Bay of Panama wetlands is now a test case for the effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention. BirdLife has also provided updates on development threats to three key East African wetlands and IBAs - Lake Natron in Tanzania and Lake Naivasha and the Tana River Delta in Kenya. Despite the very important issues up for discussion, there is a risk that much time and energy at COP will be spent on an administrative topic - the institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat. Parties are divided about whether hosting should remain with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) or move to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The arguments for both options have been rehearsed endlessly but given the inevitable costs and disruption of a shift, BirdLife sees no justification for such a change. Alongside the other IOPs, BirdLife will be urging Parties to make a quick and definitive decision on this issue and avoid further distraction from the real challenges facing Ramsar. A dozen Partner and Secretariat staff from around the world, together with Societatea Ornitologica Romana (BirdLife in Romania), will be representing BirdLife at the COP and working hard for positive outcomes for wetlands, birds and people. Watch this space for updates! **Further information** BirdLife International and the Ramsar Convention - How BirdLife Partners are supporting Governments to implement Ramsar [Leaflet \(PDF\)](#) East Asian Flyway coastal wetlands - [Factsheet \(PDF\) on ecological crisis](#) Save the Bay of Panama [Factsheet \(PDF\)](#) Current status of four threatened wetlands: [BirdLife Briefing to RAMSAR CO11 \(PDF\)](#)