

Things we all need to know about wetlands.

1. What is a wetland?

Ans. Wetlands are areas where water is the primary factor controlling the environment and the associated plant and animal life. They occur where the water table is at or near the surface of the land, or where the land is covered by shallow water.

Under the text of the Ramsar Convention (Article 1.1), wetlands are defined as: “areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres”.

2. Name different types of wetlands.

Ans. Five major wetland types are generally recognized:

- marine (coastal wetlands including coastal lagoons, rocky shores, and coral reefs);
- estuarine (including deltas, tidal marshes, and mangrove swamps);
- lacustrine (wetlands associated with lakes);
- riverine (wetlands along rivers and streams); and
- palustrine (meaning “marshy” - marshes, swamps and bogs).

In addition, there are human-made wetlands such as fish and shrimp ponds, farm ponds, irrigated agricultural land, salt pans, reservoirs, gravel pits, sewage farms and canals. The Ramsar Convention has adopted a Ramsar Classification of Wetland Type which includes 42 types, grouped into three categories: Marine and Coastal Wetlands, Inland Wetlands, and Human-made Wetlands.

3. Why conserve wetlands?

Ans. Wetlands are among the world’s most productive environments. They are cradles of biological diversity, providing the water and primary productivity upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival. They support high concentrations of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrate species. Wetlands are also important storehouses of plant genetic material. Rice, for example, which is a common wetland plant, is the staple diet of more than half of humanity.

The multiple roles of wetland ecosystems and their value to humanity have been increasingly understood and documented in recent years. This has led to large expenditures to restore lost or degraded hydrological and biological functions of wetlands. But it’s not enough – the race is on to improve practices on a significant global scale as the world’s leaders try to cope with the accelerating water crisis and the effects of climate change.

By 2025, two out of every three people on Earth may well face life in water stressed conditions.

The ability of wetlands to adapt to changing conditions, and to accelerating rates of change, will be crucial to human communities and wildlife everywhere as the full impact of climate change on our ecosystem lifelines is felt. Small wonder that there is a worldwide focus on wetlands and their services to us.

In addition, wetlands are important, and sometimes essential, for the health, welfare and safety of people who live in or near them. They are amongst the world's most productive environments and provide a wide array of benefits.

4. Discuss Wetland values

Ans. Wetlands provide tremendous economic benefits, for example: water supply (quantity and quality); fisheries (over two thirds of the world's fish harvest is linked to the health of coastal and inland wetland areas); agriculture, through the maintenance of water tables and nutrient retention in floodplains; timber production; energy resources, such as peat and plant matter; wildlife resources; transport; and recreation and tourism opportunities.

In addition, wetlands have special attributes as part of the cultural heritage of humanity: they are related to religious and cosmological beliefs, constitute a source of aesthetic inspiration, provide wildlife sanctuaries, and form the basis of important local traditions.

These functions, values and attributes can only be maintained if the ecological processes of wetlands are allowed to continue functioning. Unfortunately, and in spite of important progress made in recent decades, wetlands continue to be among the world's most threatened ecosystems, owing mainly to ongoing drainage, conversion, pollution, and over-exploitation of their resources.

5. What is the Ramsar Convention on wetlands?

The *Convention on Wetlands* is an intergovernmental treaty adopted on 2 February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. Thus, though nowadays the name of the Convention is usually written "Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)", it has come to be known popularly as the "Ramsar Convention". Ramsar is the first of the modern global intergovernmental treaties on the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

6. Is India a member country to Ramsar convention?

Ans. Yes.

7. Name the Ramsar sites in India.

Sr. No.	Name of Wetland	Date of declaration	State
1	Ashtamudi Wetland	19/08/02	Kerala
2	Bhitarkanika Mangroves	19/08/02	Orissa
3	Bhoj Wetland	19/08/02	Madhya Pradesh
4	Chandertal Wetland	08/11/05	Himachal Pradesh
5	Chilika Lake	01/10/81	Orissa
6	Deepor Beel	19/08/02	Assam
7	East Calcutta Wetlands	19/08/02	West Bengal
8	Harike Lake	23/03/90	Punjab
9	Hokera Wetland	08/11/05	Jammu and Kashmir
10	Kanjli	22/01/02	Punjab
11	Keoladeo National Park	01/10/81	Rajasthan
12	Kolleru Lake	19/08/02	Andhra Pradesh
13	Loktak Lake	23/03/90	Manipur
14	Point Calimere	19/08/02	Tamil Nadu
15	Pong Dam Lake	19/08/02	Himachal Pradesh
16	Renuka Wetland	08/11/05	Himachal Pradesh
17	Ropar	22/01/02	Punjab
18	Rudrasagar Lake	08/11/05	Tripura
19	Sambhar Lake	23/03/90	Rajasthan
20	Sasthamkotta Lake	19/08/02	Kerala
21	Surinsar-Mansar Lakes	08/11/05	Jammu and Kashmir
22	Tsomoriri	19/08/02	Jammu and Kashmir
23	Vembanad-Kol Wetland	19/08/02	Kerala
24	Wular Lake	23/03/90	Jammu and Kashmir
25	UpperGangaRiver (Brijghat to Narora Stretch)	08/11/05	Uttar Pradesh

8. What is World Wetlands Day?

Ans. 2 February each year is World Wetlands Day. It marks the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. WWD was celebrated for the first time

in 1997 and made an encouraging beginning. Each year, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and groups of citizens at all levels of the community have taken advantage of the opportunity to undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general and the Ramsar Convention in particular. From 1997 to 2008, the Convention's Web site has posted reports from more than 95 countries of WWD activities of all sizes and shapes, from lectures and seminars, nature walks, children's art contests, sampan races, and community clean-up days, to radio and television interviews and letters to newspapers, to the launch of new wetland policies, new Ramsar sites, and new programmes at the national level.