

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE NEXT?

CONFIRMING OFFICIAL LISTS OF CANDIDATE SITES

This document gives an up-to-date list of sites that are shown by IBA data to merit Ramsar designation. It is offered to governments as a technical contribution from BirdLife International in its capacity as one of the Convention's International Organisation Partners. Meetings of the Contracting Parties at the regional and global levels should endorse these findings in appropriate ways, but decisions as to what shall be official candidate sites, and decisions as to designation, remain the responsibility of Parties.

In many instances the data in this document arise from collaborative work between NGOs (BirdLife Partners) and governments.

It is an important and urgent 'next step' for the lists of deserving Ramsar Site candidates presented in this document to be officially recognised as such by Contracting Party governments. In some cases, where there has been good discussion of the matter already, this may now be no more than a rapid formality. In others, where more consideration is required, BirdLife urges that attention be given to it immediately.

The Conference of Parties called for such action in 1996, in Resolution VI.12 which, *inter alia*, "urges each Contracting Party

to recognise officially its identified sites meeting the criteria approved by the Conference of the Contracting Parties".

For countries which are not yet Ramsar Parties, this document should help with protection of their wetlands in the meantime, and should contribute towards their preparation for accession and their initial implementation of the Convention thereafter.

DEFINING RAMSAR SITE BOUNDARIES

It is beyond the scope of this document to indicate the precise boundary of each site, but clearly, before designation, definition of such boundaries will be required as a 'next step'. In many cases an appropriate boundary will already be suggested by the boundary of the IBA. Contracting Party governments are therefore urged to take the earliest opportunity to discuss this with BirdLife Partners and the BirdLife Secretariat (see 'Contact points').

In some cases, in addition to an IBA boundary which encompasses an area of significance for birds, other contiguous or functionally connected areas beyond it which are wetland habitats meeting non-bird Ramsar criteria might also need to be included in any eventual Ramsar Site. In some other cases, an IBA that contains wetland habitats of sufficient importance to

Box 1. Extract from Guidelines for adopting a systematic approach to identifying priority wetlands for designation under the Ramsar Convention (annexed to Resolution VII.11).

46. Boundary definition of sites. When designating sites, Contracting Parties are encouraged to take a management-oriented approach to determining boundaries, recognising that these should allow management of the site to be undertaken at the appropriate scale for maintaining the ecological character of the wetland. Article 2.1 of the Convention indicates that Ramsar Sites "may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands". For very small and therefore potentially vulnerable sites, Contracting Parties are encouraged to include buffer zones around the wetland. These may also be a useful management tool for subterranean system wetlands as well as larger sites.

47. In determining the boundaries of sites identified as habitat for animal species, these should be established so as to provide adequately for all the ecological and conservation requirements of those populations. In particular, large animals, species at the top of food-chains, those with large home-ranges, or with feeding and resting areas that are widely separated, will generally require substantial areas to support viable populations. If it is not possible to designate a site extending to the entire range used or accommodating viable (self-sustaining) populations, then additional measures relating to both the species and its habitat should be adopted in the surrounding areas (or the buffer zone). These measures will complement the protection of the core habitat within the Ramsar Site.

48. While some sites considered for designation will be identified at landscape scale, containing substantial elements of whole wetland ecosystems, others may be smaller. In selecting and delimiting such more restricted wetlands the following guidance may assist in determining their extent:

- i. as far as possible, sites should include complexes or mosaics of vegetation communities, not just single communities of importance. Note that wetlands with naturally nutrient poor (oligotrophic) conditions generally exhibit low diversity of species and habitats. In these wetlands, high diversity may be associated with low conservation quality (indicated by markedly altered conditions). Thus, diversity must always be considered within the context of the norms of the wetland type;
- ii. zonations of communities should be included as completely as possible in the site. Important are communities showing natural gradients (transitions), for instance from wet to dry, from salt to brackish, from brackish to fresh, from oligotrophic to eutrophic, from rivers to their associated banks, shingle bars and sediment systems, etc.;
- iii. natural succession of vegetation communities often proceeds rapidly in wetlands. To the greatest extent possible and where these exist, all phases of succession (for example, from open shallow water, to communities of emergent vegetation, to reedswamp, to marshland or peatland, to wet forest) should be included in designated sites. Where dynamic changes are occurring, it is important that the site is large enough so that pioneer stages can continue to develop within the Ramsar Site;
- iv. continuity of a wetland with a terrestrial habitat of high conservation value will enhance its own conservation value.

49. The smaller the site, the more vulnerable it is likely to be to outside influences. In determining boundaries of Ramsar Sites, particular attention should be given to ensuring that wherever possible the limits of the sites serve to protect them from potentially damaging activities, especially those likely to cause hydrological disturbance. Ideally, boundaries should include those areas of land necessary to provide and maintain the hydrological functions needed to conserve the international importance and integrity of the site. Alternatively, it is important that planning processes are operating to ensure that potential negative impacts arising from land-use practices on adjoining land or within the drainage basin are suitably regulated and monitored to provide confidence that the ecological character of the Ramsar Site will not be compromised.