# PRIORITY PROJECT LIST FOR RAMSAR SITES

*The following Ramsar Sites contain significant aquatic and marine components with immediate opportunities for ICWRP investment. Project opportunities may already be available or could be developed by new partners in these or other regions or sites. Contact the ICWRP partners for details.*

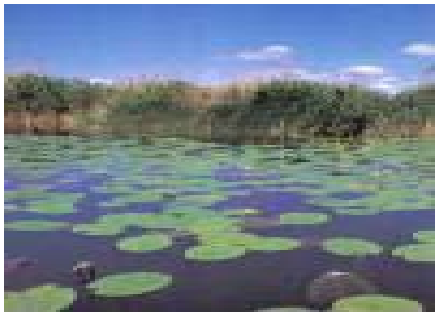
*For information on Ramsar sites or the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, visit the Ramsar website: http://www.ramsar.org*

## Belarus

**Site:** Osveiski Reserve is a large complex of lakes, forests, transition and bog mires located 150 km northwest of the city of Vitebsk. The core of the site is Lake Osveia, the biggest eutrophic lake in Belarus (5,300 ha, including a big island), which is rapidly being overgrown with aquatic vegetation but still plays a significant role in the hydrological and climatic patterns of northern Belarus. During migration, the site hosts more than 20,000 waterbirds, but it is also an important breeding ground for several thousand pairs of grebes, ducks, cranes, and waders. Ancient dwellings and mound graves from the 5th century B.C. to the 17th century A.D. have been discovered, as well as mass graves of victims of World War II.

**Project Opportunity:** At the border with Latvia and Russia, Osveiski Ramsar site has been losing its biodiversity, mainly due to peat extraction which has caused a significant drop in water level. The project covers preparatory field studies and the elaboration of technical documents to restore the bog. The Ministry of Natural Resources confirmed a budget to undertake the restoration works once the preparatory studies are available. The project begins with a two-day workshop gathering stakeholders from Belarus, Latvia and Russia to discuss the problems facing the area. It also includes preparation of recommendations on fish stock sustainable use and the development of a monitoring system for the wetlands.

## Bulgaria



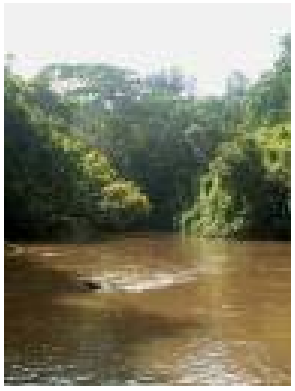
**Site:** Belene Islands Complex is designated as a reserve, natural monument, and natural park. A group of one big (Belene) and nine smaller islands located along 16km of the Danube River, the site is a particularly good representative example of a natural riverine wetland complex in the Danube River catchment. The site has exceptional biodiversity values and hosts several rare species of plants as well as five globally threatened species of birds. It is one of the most important breeding grounds along the Danube River for mixed colonies of herons, egrets, ibises and cormorants (6,000-9,000 pairs) and offers suitable stopover sites for about 20 migratory species of birds. The islands once had a significant role as a nursery for about 20 fish species, and efforts are being made to reinstate their importance with a planned restoration project.

**Project Opportunity:** Kaikusha marshes are a protected area included in a nature park at the border with Romania, formerly connected to the Danube River. Due to the interruption of this connection and the existence of a drainage system, the wetland has been drying up. The main objective of the project is the restoration of the water regime through construction works to rehabilitate the wetland biodiversity. After completion, it would be used as a model to encourage wetland sustainable use practices through meetings with stakeholders, local community training and dissemination of educational materials. A proposal for the extension of the existing Belene Islands Complex Ramsar Site to include Kaikusha would be drafted at the end of the project.

## Cote D'Ivoire

**Site:** Cote D'Ivoire

**Project Title**: Contribution to the conservation and the wise use of Wetlands in Cote D'Ivoire



**Project Opportunity:** This project calls for on-the-ground ecological inventory and assessment of a minimum of two wetlands as preparation for Ramsar site designation. It is a one year project that is mainly based on field trips and on site discovery. Work would include a review of existing literature, working with local communities in information gathering (interviews and use of local guides and experts), and workshops to raise awareness of wetland values and functions identified during the project.

The project will assist in identifying the most significant sites from a biodiversity and ecological point of view, the status and endemism of species present and the main threats to each site. It will also look at the socio-economic characteristics of the identified sites and their importance to local communities' livelihoods. As a consequence the project will greatly contribute to the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetland areas in Cote D'Ivoire.

## Guatemala

**Site:** Punta de Manabique, designated an Area of Special Protection, is located in the Honduran Gulf on the Caribbean coast. The site includes a) marine; b) marshes and swamps; c) coastal; and d) terrestrial ecosystems. The marine area is shallow with a sandy bottom and a few patches of corals and the marshes and swamps serve as refuge for many species such as manatees. Iguanas, crocodiles, panthers and tapirs are among the other endangered species in the area. The main economic activity is fishing in shallow waters. Hunting of wildlife such as iguanas is also important, as well as grazing and rice plantations within the borders of the wetland. Expansion of grazing areas, use of pesticides and fertilizers, and improper development of tourist resorts present some threat.

**Ecotourism Project Opportunity:** The aim of this project is to improve and promote ecotourism services in Punta de Manabique Ramsar site. Thus, economically viable alternatives will be secured for local dwellers, minimizing the impact caused by human activities on the site. Some funds will cover improvements in the infrastructure of the existing lodge and visitor centers. Local communities will be trained in hospitality management, accounting, and guidance on nature trails. Finally, ecotourism packages will be advertised nationally and internationally through travel agencies and the Internet. Throughout the whole project, a visitor control and evaluation scheme will be set up to receive feedback from tourists and monitor visitor numbers to protect the site from abuse.

## Liberia

**Site:** The Mesurado River, including Bushrod and Providence Islands, is historically important to the founding of Liberia. Providence Island was occupied by settlers from the United States upon their arrival. The Mesurado River contains valuable species of fish. Many evenings people in large numbers are observed fishing from the Gabriel Tucker Bridge (Johnson Street Bridge) that links central Monrovia to Bushrod Island. The river is a major supplier of seafood for the Monrovia populace including the nearby township through which the river flows.

**Project Opportunity:** The river is now under threat from industrial and human waste. The petroleum oil depot in Monrovia experiences oil spillage into the River. The displaced residents in and near Monrovia are polluting the river by dumping garbage and human waste into the river. Studies to determine the levels of toxicity are needed to implement the necessary remedial actions to rescue the marine life forms in the Mesurado River.

## Mexico

**Complex of Three Sites:**

1) Reserva Estatal El Palmar, a State Reserve, lies on the northwestern coast of the Yucatán peninsula and features mangroves, seagrass beds and tidal flats, as well as coastal dune vegetation, petenes (emerging islands of forests protected from saline intrusions), sinkholes or cenotes, swamp forests and low deciduous forest. El Palmar harbors a significant population of Greater Flamingos and 15 duck species. The site also provides nesting ground for the endangered Hawksbill turtle, for which a nest survey and liberation program is underway. Fishing, agriculture, hunting and palm leaf collection are the main economic activities, which also represent the main potential threats to the site.

2) Biosphere Reserve Ría Celestún is a diverse complex of wetlands including mangroves, seagrass beds, small estuaries, coastal dunes,

hypersaline coastal lagoons, karstic caves and other coastal wetland types. Fresh water from subterranean aquifers have an outlet in the site. Eight specific vegetation zones are present, providing habitat for several notable or endangered species of plants. The vegetative diversity gives rise to an abundant fauna, representing a high percentage of species known in the Yucatan, including numerous threatened or endangered species. The site is of particular importance as a nesting and feeding site for turtles and migratory birds.

3) Biosphere Reserve Los Petenes is located in the western Yucatan peninsula just north of the city of Campeche, whose old town is a World Heritage Site. Los Petenes owes its name to this unique ecosystem, consisting of islands of low seasonally flooded and/or mangrove forests associated with underwater springs from sinkholes or cenotes. The marine parts of the site are noteworthy for their seagrass beds, while inland the landscape is dominated by a saline wetland dotted with petenes. The site hosts relatively large colonies of White Ibis and Greater Flamingoes. In 2003, a joint council of several institutions was established to carry out a conservation initiative in western Yucatan.

**Ecotourism Project Opportunity**: The project aims to promote sound ecotourism development, an environmental education program and design a strategic plan for economic incentives in these three Ramsar Sites along the Gulf of Mexico coast in Yucatan. For the ecotourism part, the current guides in Ría Celestún will be trained so as to provide training of two groups for the other Ramsar sites, with emphasis on birds and birdwatching. The educational aspect will be designed so as to educate the population about the most prominent problems and potential solutions in the areas by means of materials, news and radio articles and programs. Incentives will be offered to encourage pilot areas to develop land conservation programs and engage in further fundraising to support their implementation.

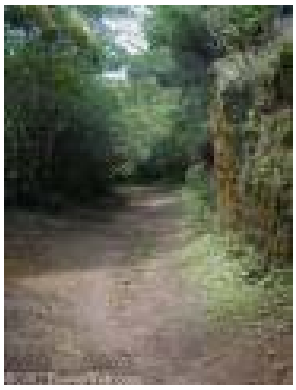
## Nicaragua

**Site**: Lago de Apanás-Asturias is an artificial lake or reservoir formed by two electricity-producing barrages of the Río Tuma in the mountainous north of the country, characterized by seasonally flooded agricultural land, water storage areas, and canals for transport and drainage. The endangered Perro de Agua "water dog" (Plata Otter) is supported, and the site is also important for a number of aquatic birds and for fish, a number of which have high economic value in the area. The site has high potential for ecotourism because of its migratory birds and artisanal fishing practices, and recreational and educational potentials are high as well.

**Project Opportunity**: The project aims to elaborate a management plan for the site with active consultation and participation of civil society, government agencies, NGOs and the hydroelectric power station which operates the dam. The management plan will identify a

series of projects for sustainable development benefiting the 25,000 inhabitants of the basin. A survey of the area for further data collection regarding wildlife, climate, soils and socioeconomic variables will lead to the preparation of a zoning and regulatory use scheme. Funding for this project is very important for boosting the management planning process of wetlands in Nicaragua under the guidelines of the recently issued National Wetlands Policy.

## Palau



**Site:** Ngardok Nature Reserve

**Project Title:** Reducing threats of fire and erosion in Ngardok Nature Reserve, Palau

**Project Opportunity:** The project addresses the need to control fire and soil erosion, the main threats to the reserve, which will become increasingly important as a water supply source when Palau's capital city relocates to the region. Control of erosion is planned by revegetation trials, and fire is to be regulated by development of a fire monitoring program. In addition, community outreach, education and participation activities are envisaged with involvement of local schools. A well-presented proposal with clear objectives and well-detailed activities, but some budget and work plan amendments are needed if the project is approved. Implementing this project would reduce the risk of fire-hazards in the reserve and important for sustainability for eco-tourism. The reserve has potential to contribute largely to country's economy through eco-tourism development. This is one of the follow-up outcomes based on the assessment made under the previous SGF. However, the project has opportunity to draw matching funds from the local government and the Reserve for some follow up activities like plantation to reduce soil erosion.

## Paraguay

**Site**: Lago Ypoá National Park is an area of extensive, shallow, clustered lakes (esterales) with floating mats of vegetation, some supporting small trees and fauna. Esterales are interspersed with forested islands, savannah, rocky areas, and streams. This site provides excellent wildlife habitat and is one of the most important aquatic environments in Paraguay, important for several threatened species, migrating birds, and five species of threatened plants. Timber cutting and livestock rearing occur in the site, while extensive ranching occurs in the surrounding area.

**Project Opportunity:** The Lago Ypoa Ramsar Site has not yet been properly inventoried in terms of its flora and fauna, despite being a Wetland of International Importance since 1995. The site is a natural spawning water body for many fish. Intensive surveys are planned to be carried out on wildlife and water quality monitoring. A comprehensive fish species inventory and catalogue will be produced as a result.

## Sri Lanka

**Site:** Pigeon Islands National Park

**Project Title**: Towards collaborative management and declaration of Sri Lanka's First Marine Ramsar Site: Pigeon Islands National Park

**Project Opportunity**: This well prepared proposal has a strong capacity-building component and potential transferability to other parts of the region. Proposed work covers an ambitious set of activities including preparation of sustainable resource management guideline through rapid ecological and rapid participatory assessment of this marine wetland (coral reefs), development of an ecotourism strategy, preparation of a zoning plan, declaration of the site as a Ramsar Site, institutional strengthening, community participation and development of an educational program. Sri Lanka has just completed another SGF with similar activities. This site has been impacted by the Indian Ocean tsunami and therefore, it will be useful to include some modifications on land zoning, and inclusion of preparedness from the natural disaster. The project implementation can assist in speedy recovery of the site condition and stand as an example for other similar areas. Also the project will be useful to Ramsar site designation and future recommendation if it can be taken as one of the test case in line with wise use of coastal wetlands and natural disaster impact mitigation in populated islands.

## Ukraine

**Site:** At the present the Izmail Islands have status as a Regional Landscape Park. Notwithstanding this fact, there is a danger of decreasing biodiversity, including globally endangered species because of the land users' limited experience in sustainable management and use of natural resources.

**Project Opportunity:** The project addresses the improvement of the national policy for wetland conservation through the preparation of a methodology for future designation of Ramsar sites, the listing of new sites, and the improvement of the capacity for the management of the Izmail Islands, a potential Ramsar site upstream of the Danube Delta, through training of forestry staff and local stakeholders. Transborder aspects and public awareness issues are also covered through a planned international workshop, the promotion of transfrontier cooperation within the Lower Danube Euroregion and the production of a film on the values of the Izmail Islands.