

## What is the State of the World's Remaining Wetlands? SWS members' help urgently needed!

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### The issue

We know that humankind has been enthusiastically draining and converting natural inland and coastal wetlands for centuries and that this has been happening worldwide. Recent evidence suggests that we may have lost as much as 87% of the world's natural wetlands since 1700 AD (Figure 1), and that the rates of conversion were almost four times faster in the 20th century than in previous centuries (Davidson 2014). Despite increasing recognition of the great importance of wetlands for the ecosystem services they deliver to people, this wetland conversion is continuing, and it is estimated that 30% of remaining natural wetlands have been lost since 1970 (Dixon et al. 2016).

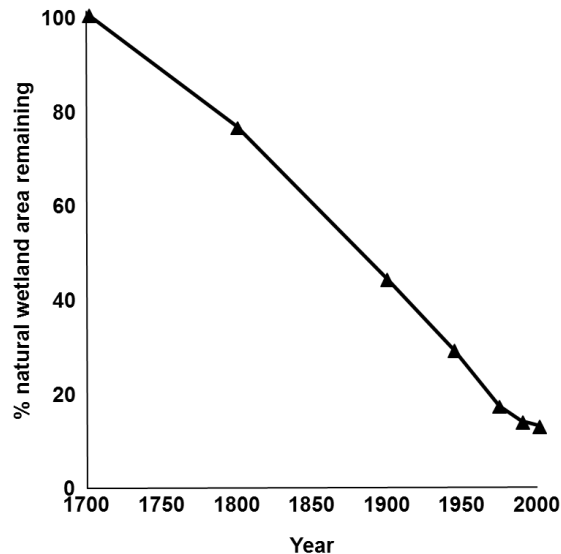


Figure 1. Long-term losses of the world's natural wetlands since 1700 AD. From Davidson (2014), reproduced with permission of the publisher.

But we have much less information about the state of our remaining wetlands – that remaining 13% at the bottom of the graph in Figure 1. Yet knowing about the state of health of our remaining wetlands is vital information in order to inform decision-taking and policy-making, including by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The SWS Ramsar Section has, over the last two years, been considering this issue, reviewing the information available and how to try to improve this important knowledge gap, through symposia, workshops and discussions including at the SWS annual conferences in 2015 and 2016, and at the 10th INTECOL wetlands conference in 2016.

### Next steps

From the outcomes of these SWS processes and discussions the SWS Ramsar Section, in collaboration with other wetland expert networks (including the World Wetland Network (WWN, [www.worldwetnet.org](http://www.worldwetnet.org)) and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT, [www.wwt.org.uk](http://www.wwt.org.uk)), has started an initiative seeking to improve access to knowledge about the status and trends of our remaining

wetlands. One part of this initiative is the current preparation of a set of journal papers assessing existing information and knowledge of wetland status and trends and gaps in this knowledge, and making recommendations for future improvements. These are due for publication later in 2017.

The second part of the initiative is to undertake a qualitative assessment of as many of the world's wetlands as possible. This is being done through a simple online questionnaire about the current state, and trends in that state, of wetlands. It has been designed to be filled in (in about 10 minutes) by anyone who knows about a wetland or wetlands (large or small, protected or un-protected). This questionnaire approach has been fully endorsed by the SWS Executive Board and was launched in April 2017. The questionnaire is available in different languages, so as to make it accessible and easy to use by as many different people around the world as possible.

Results of this questionnaire survey will be summarized in WSP and circulated to all those who have participated by submitting information on their wetland, and it is also planned to prepare a more formal journal paper on the results for submission to *Wetlands*. The results will also be presented to the Ramsar Convention.

This SWS Ramsar Section initiative provides a great example of how SWS expertise can and does contribute to informing the science-policy interface of the Ramsar Convention, in line with the Ramsar-SWS Memorandum of Cooperation which has been renewed on the occasion of the SWS Europe Chapter conference in Faro, Portugal in May 2017.

### **How can SWS members help?**

Have you been undertaking research in a wetland? Are you restoring a wetland? Do you live near a wetland and have watched it change over the years? Have you been visiting a wetland over the years just to enjoy its wonderful nature? We are sure that most, or all, SWS members have such knowledge and information about a wetland – otherwise you wouldn't be a SWS member!

All SWS members should have already received an email from SWS announcing the survey, so this article acts as a reminder that if you have not already contributed, please do so now. The deadline for completing the survey is 30 September 2017.

Your knowledge is really vital to the success of this survey. Go online, at: <http://www.worldwetnet.org/about-us/world-wetlands-survey-2017>. There the questionnaire can be filled in the language of your choice. You can do this online in one of six languages: English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Russian or Chinese. If you prefer, for some languages you can download the questionnaire as an Excel form, currently available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Japanese. Save your completed form, with the wetland name in the filename, and email it to: [wli@wwt.org.uk](mailto:wli@wwt.org.uk).

Our big thanks to all SWS members in helping to make this important gap-filling survey a big success! Particular thanks if you have already contributed to the survey – and thanks in advance if you are about to!

### **References**

Davidson, N.C. 2014. How much wetland has the world lost? Long-term and recent trends in global wetland area. *Marine and Freshwater Research* 65: 934-941.

Dixon, M.J.R., J. Loh, N.C. Davidson, C. Beltrame, R. Freeman, and M. Walpole. 2016. Tracking global change in ecosystem area: The Wetland Extent Trends index. *Biological Conservation* 193: 27–35.