

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS) Renew Memorandum of Cooperation at SWS Europe Chapter Meeting in Faro, Portugal

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The SWS Europe Chapter convened a resoundingly successful Annual Meeting, held jointly with the European Pond Conservation Network (EPCN) in Faro, Portugal, from May 2nd through May 6th, 2017. At the meeting, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Secretary General Martha Rojas-Urrego and Society of Wetland Scientists President Gillian Davies signed and renewed the Ramsar – SWS Memorandum of Cooperation (See Photos 1 & 2). This Memorandum creates the framework for collaboration between the two organizations during the 2017 – 2023 timeframe.

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, and includes 169 Contracting Parties (nations) and 2,266 Ramsar Sites throughout the world. The Ramsar Convention and SWS share objectives for protecting, conserving, restoring and sustainably managing wetlands around the world, as well as providing wetlands education and outreach. As the Memorandum notes, “The Convention on Wetlands and the SWS recognize the fundamental role played by wetlands in regulating and providing water, in supporting maintenance of cultural and biological diversity, in ensuring high ecosystem integrity, in regulating climate, and in providing ecosystem services and benefits for people and the planet.”

SWS is an observer organization to the Convention on Wetlands, has a Ramsar Section and a representative to the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel, and collaborates with Ramsar across a wide range of initiatives. Most recently, the SWS Ramsar Section has collaborated with the Ramsar Secretariat, the World Wetland Network, and Wildfowl & Wetland Trust to initiate a citizen science wetland assessment of the condition of the world’s wetlands (<http://www.worldwetnet.org/about-us/world-wetlands-survey-2017>). It was also agreed that the Ramsar Secretariat will be giving a webinar as part of the SWS webinar series in June (<http://www.sws.org/About-SWS/upcoming-webinars-for-nonmembers.html>).

The SWS Europe Chapter has been establishing and developing important liaisons with other groups and networks active in wetland research, protection and managements in Europe, and this year partnered with the European Pond Conservation Network (EPCN) to host a joint Annual Meeting and field trips. Members and leaders of several societies, as well as members of other SWS Chapters, attended the SWS-EPCN meeting in Faro. At the meeting, the Europe Chapter signed two Memoranda of Cooperation with fellow societies WETPOL (Wetland Pollutant Dynamics and Control) and the Constructed



PHOTO #1: Ramsar Convention Secretary General Martha Rojas-Urrego and SWS President Gillian Davies sign and renew the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands – Society of Wetland Scientists Memorandum of Cooperation.

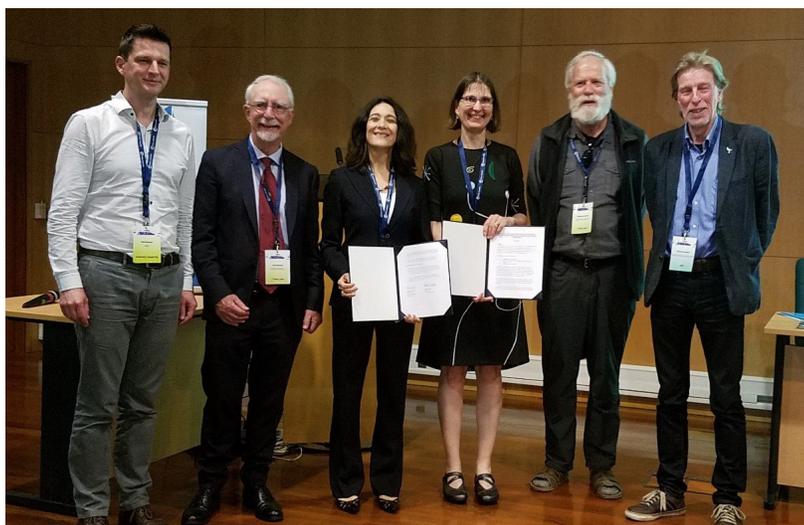


PHOTO #2: From left to right: SWS Europe Chapter President-Elect Mathew Simpson, SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven, Ramsar Convention Secretary General Martha Rojas-Urrego, SWS President Gillian Davies, SWS President-Elect Arnold Van der Valk, SWS Ramsar Section Chair Nick Davidson.

Wetlands Association (See Photos 3 & 4). WETPOL is an organization that brings scientists, engineers and practitioners together to focus on the use of natural as well as constructed wetlands for water quality improvement. The Constructed Wetlands Association promotes the application of constructed wetland technologies to address water pollution issues.

Additionally, the SWS Europe Chapter has recently become a member society in the Mediterranean Wetland Alliance. Because Europe borders the Mediterranean, and conference programming included presentations on Mediterranean wetlands, the meeting drew attendees from the Mediterranean region of North Africa as well as Europe. Further, meeting attendees signed the “Call to Ac-

tion to Halt the Degradation of Islands’ Wetlands of the Mediterranean Basin”, which, “...extends a pledge to all interested parties, including the national Governments, the European Commission, local authorities and administrations, academia, the NGO community, donor agencies, and the public, on the urgent need to conserve the important wetland ecosystems of the Mediterranean Islands” and “Invites the Ramsar Secretariat to further support the National Governments to designate small islands wetlands in the List of Wetlands of International Importance” and “Invites the Secretariat to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocol to further urge the Mediterranean countries for the ratification of the ICZM Protocol” (http://sws.org/images/chapters/europe/Call_for_action_IslandWetlands.pdf).



PHOTO #3: SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven signs Memorandum of Cooperation with WETPOL's Diederik Rousseau.



PHOTO #4: SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven signs Memorandum of Cooperation with Constructed Wetland Association's and SWS Europe Chapter President-Elect Matthew Simpson.



PHOTO #5: From left to right: SWS President Gillian Davies, Bangor University Student Association President Dan Roberts, faculty advisor Chris Freeman, SWS President-Elect Arnold Van der Valk, SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven.



PHOTO #6: Student oral presentation award winner Sophie-Bo Heinkel and SWS President Gillian Davies.

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PHOTO #7: SWS President Gillian Davies, SWS International Chapter member and Ph.D. student Afrah Saad Al-Mahfadi and SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven prepare to tour Doñana National Park.



PHOTO #8: Doñana National Park, Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.



PHOTO #9: Wild horses graze near egrets, with flamingos in the distance, at Doñana National Park.



PHOTO #10: SWS Europe Chapter members on field trip to the Doñana National Park.

The SWS Europe Chapter had invited the Ramsar Secretary General Martha Rojas-Urrego and SWS President Gillian Davies to attend the Faro meeting for signing the Memorandum of Cooperation. This event and the presence of both leading officers gave the chapter meeting a special atmosphere of global interaction and collaboration. Together with the special features on the conservation of the Doñana delta, paludiculture to mitigate peatland loss and retention of pharmaceuticals in wetlands, the island wetlands Call to Action and the signing of two more MoCs, this resulted in successful and tangible outreach to the worlds of policy and practice. Europe Chapter leadership feels that the presence of SWS President Gillian Davies has been outright essential. She was very visible during the meeting and has networked effectively with high-ranking officials as well as chapter members, students and practitioners. After the successful and inspiring visit of SWS Past President Kim Ponzio in Potsdam in 2016, this year's visit by the President has reinforced the connection between the Europe Chapter and the leadership of the Society. The importance of this linkage can hardly be underestimated. There is a large potential for future SWS members among scientists and professionals working in wetland science in Europe. It is the Europe Chapter's ambition to involve these people in the Chapter and the Society is greatly helped by the support of the SWS leadership, as is shown by the scientific and cross-sector interactions during the meeting reported above.

62 people attended the meeting, 52 percent of whom are SWS members. This represents a 47 percent increase in member attendees compared to 2016 when only 15% of attendees were members.

Kudos to Ph.D. student Dan Roberts and faculty advisor Chris Freeman, both of whom attended the Faro meeting, for launching the first SWS student chapter in Europe and outside the U.S. at Bangor University in Wales (see Photo #5), where over 30 students have gotten involved. The Europe Chapter presented an oral presentation award to Sophie-Bo Heinkel (See Photo #6) and a poster award to Javier Pérez. Congratulations to these students for their excellent work! SWS would also like to thank Ph.D. student Afrah Saad Al-Mahfadi for travelling from Morocco (See Photo #7), where she is studying at Mohammed V University, to attend the SWS Europe Chapter meeting. Afrah is a member of our International Chapter, and gave an outstanding presentation on her project to survey all the wetlands in her home country of Yemen, a task that had not yet been addressed by wetland scientists. We look forward to hearing more from these talented students, as they advance in their wetlands careers.

A special highlight of the meeting was the field trip to Doñana National Park in Spain, which is a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and is part of a larger Biosphere Reserve (See Photo #8). Doñana

is a refuge for 6 million birds that migrate between Europe and Africa, as well as wild boars, lynx, red deer, fallow deer, wild horses, and more. The wild horses appear to be a facultative wetland species, enjoying grazing in both wetlands and uplands (See Photo #9)! Although the physical area of Doñana has been protected, it continues to be threatened by significant groundwater withdrawal, agricultural and mining industry runoff, and dredging of the Guadalquivir River. Climate change further exacerbates these threats. Thanks to the efforts of Jos Verhoeven, participants toured a restricted area with extensive biodiversity. SWS members climbed a large dune that has been migrating into wetlands since juniper trees were cleared from the dunes in former centuries. In Photo #10), extensive wetlands can be seen behind the dune that wetland scientists are standing on.

During the conference, there were two more one-day field trips. The first trip visited a beautiful stream valley landscape along the Ribeira do Vascão, where the EU-LIFE project Saramugo is being carried out (See Photo #11). The project investigates negative impacts of invasive species and methods to minimize these. The fish fauna (11 native species) is being threatened by as many as 14 species of non-native, mostly predator species. The vegetation on the stream banks is locally invaded by tall non-native reeds, *Arundo donax*. In the afternoon a heavy metal mine waste site was visited, where wetlands are designed to work with the acid mine drainage. The second trip concentrated on

Mediterranean temporary ponds in the area Vila do Bispo and Sagres, where the EU-LIFE project Charcos is in full swing. Ponds in good condition as well as ponds in the stage of being restored were visited.

Europe Chapter President Mathew Simpson, Europe Chapter Past President Jos Verhoeven, Ramsar Representative Nick Davidson, Europe Chapter members Rob McInnes and Rebecca Woodward, SWS President Elect Arnold van der Valk, and SWS President Gillian Davies held a conference call with SWS Professional Certification Program (PCP) President John Lowenthal and Harold Jones to discuss strategies for improving the international process for certification. Matt Simpson recently completed the Professional Wetland Scientist certification process, allowing him to provide useful feedback to the PCP, as did others in the group.

SWS loyalty runs strong in Europe, as every single SWS Europe Chapter Past President attended the Europe Chapter Annual Meeting (See Photo #12). One of the best things about joining SWS and getting actively involved is the friendships that form and that persist through decades of professional work. We should note that wetland scientists are a very special and enjoyable group of people who work to address some of the most pressing problems facing our world, all while wading through every possible variety of wetland that the world offers. If you have not renewed your membership, please do so right away! ■



PHOTO #11: Field trip to Ribeira do Vascão.



PHOTO #12: SWS Europe Chapter past and current presidents stand in order of presidency from left to right: Chris Freeman, Rob McInnis, Jan Vymazal, Jos Verhoeven, Mathew Simpson and Dominik Zak (not pictured). Matt assumed office during the Chapter Meeting.