



# Gift to the Earth



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## National Wetlands Strategy for Madagascar

Designation of more than 1 million ha of wetland areas under the Ramsar Convention

### SUMMARY

The government of Madagascar, in cooperation with local landowners, communities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has designated more than one million hectares of freshwater ecosystems as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

This major conservation achievement is underpinned with the development of a National Wetlands Strategy for the sustainable management of Madagascar's wetlands.

The Ramsar-designated sites host a rich variety of wildlife, much of it endemic – found only in Madagascar. Sustainable management of these areas is also important for food production, and for ensuring water quality and flood control.

The actions of the Madagascar Government in developing a National Wetlands Strategy and designating one million hectares of wetlands under the Ramsar Convention are recognized by WWF as a Gift to the Earth (GttE) – celebrating conservation initiatives of global significance as an example of environmental leadership and an inspiration to others.

It is hoped this will encourage further freshwater conservation actions in the Africa/Madagascar region and especially the Western Indian Ocean Ecoregion (WIOMER).



Manambolamaty Complex Ramsar site – © Martin Nicoll



Strategy development workshop – © Madagascar & West Indian Ocean Programme Office

### BACKGROUND

The National Wetlands Strategy has been developed and validated through two national workshops. The strategy aims to promote sustainable wetlands management, incorporate wetlands protection within Madagascar's environment, biodiversity and development priority policies, and to promote knowledge of the importance of wetlands. The strategy promotes involvement of wetlands owners, regional and local authorities, and other stakeholders in a participative approach.

This freshwater conservation initiative is supported by WWF and several NGOs including the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, the Peregrine Fund, Wildlife Conservation Society.

### THE CONSERVATION BENEFITS

Ten sites make up the one million hectares of Ramsar sites, of which 950,000 hectares have been designated in the last 12 months or are in the process of being designated.

One site, the 722,000 hectares Lake Alaotra, is the largest wetland in Madagascar and includes a lake, marsh, and over 500,000 hectares of surrounding river catchments and water courses.

A second site, the Tsarasaotra Park, is privately owned. Although only 4.5 hectares in extent, and close to the centre of Antananarivo, this wetland is home to 64 bird species – 14 of which are endemic and three are threatened with extinction, including the Madagascar harrier and sparrowhawk.

The National Wetlands Strategy establishes environmentally sustainable water management as a basic policy throughout Madagascar, while the Ramsar designations extend protection to specific important sites at a larger scale. This sets an example to other countries of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean ahead of the first meeting of the Ramsar Convention of the Parties in Africa, proposed to be hosted by Uganda in 2005.

The survival of Madagascar's wetland biodiversity depends on maintaining the integrity of the country's wetland ecosystems. For example 65 per cent of Madagascar's fish species are endemic (93 species), as are 99 per cent of Madagascar's amphibian species (over 300 different species), and are therefore totally reliant on healthy freshwater ecosystem.

## RELEVANCE FOR WWF'S TARGETS

The actions recognized in this GtE contribute to the target which aims to achieve 250 million hectares of freshwater ecosystems protected and sustainably managed by 2010 and to have national wetlands management policies in place.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Lake Tsimanampetsotsa Ramsar site – © Martin Nicoll



Tsarasaotra Private Park (in the middle of urbanized area) – © Sonja Ranarivelo



The Madagascar wetlands initiative is supported by several local and international organisations.

The **GIFT TO THE EARTH** is WWF's recognition of a globally significant conservation achievement, which addresses WWF's conservation priorities by:

- 🌐 Advancing conservation of biodiversity, especially forest, freshwater and marine ecosystems, or enhancing the prospects for survival of threatened species.
- 🌐 Addressing global threats posed by climate change, toxic chemicals and unsustainable use of resources such as timber, freshwater and fisheries.

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