

International Conference on the Conservation of Wetlands and Waterfowl, Ramsar, Iran

This Conference was the outcome and climax of a series of Conferences at governmental level which began at St. Andrews, Scotland, in 1963 and was followed by those at Noordwijk, Holland, in 1966 and at Leningrad, U.S.S.R., in 1968. They were supported by Technical Meetings at Ste. Marie de la Mer, France, in 1962; Jablonna, Poland, in 1965; Ankara in 1967; Vienna in 1969; Espo, Finland, in 1970.

At the invitation of the Imperial Government of Iran, the Conference was convened at Ramsar on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea from 30th January to 3rd February 1971. The organisation was the joint responsibility of the Game and Fish Department of Iran, under its Director, Mr. Eskander Firouz, and of the International Wildfowl Research Bureau under Professor G. V. T. Matthews. Iranian hospitality and efficiency provided an ideal setting for what will surely be an historic Conference. Some seventy delegates and observers from twenty-three countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, together with representatives of eight international organisations, were admirably housed and serviced at one fine hotel. The aims of the Conference were widely publicised by a special issue of three stamps depicting a Greater Flamingo, a Common Shelduck and a Ruddy Shelduck; by an excellent, illustrated booklet *The Wetlands and Waterfowl of Iran*; by a fine new film *Wealth on Wings*; by colourful posters, and by Press, radio and television coverage.

A gracious opening Message from H.I.M. the Shahinshah was read by his brother, H.I.H. Prince Abdorreza. This ended with the statement: 'To emphasise the depth of our convictions that our natural environment must be protected and that all nations are interdependent in the attainment of this goal, we wish to state that Iran is prepared to place one of her wetland ecosystems of special global significance in joint trust with a suitable international agency, such as the United Nations Organisation, to conserve and administer for all mankind.' This brought Iran to the forefront of the nations as the first to undertake to forgo part of her sovereignty for the benefit of the international community. If the lead now given were followed by other countries, the future for wetland conservation in

particular and nature conservation in general would suddenly be brighter. The Conference participants were privileged to discuss ways in which this magnificent offer could be implemented, and to visit several of the major Iranian wetlands which could be candidates for selection.

The main task of the Conference, under the able Presidency of Mr. Firouz, was to hammer out a final text of the '*Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitat*'. This had been in gestation since 1965, and this long, careful preparation paid off, for agreement was reached in the day and a half of formal discussion allotted, somewhat optimistically, by the organisers. Of course, there was much informal discussion, far into several nights, but the international lawyers present were amazed at the quick, friendly solution achieved, which undoubtedly set a new standard for such negotiations. The new Convention establishes another precedent of its own, being the first multi-lateral agreement to modify national land-use planning. By ratifying the Convention each country will undertake to conserve to the best of its ability certain carefully specified major wetlands within its boundaries. In this way it is hoped that at least the main wetlands of the world will be saved from thoughtless destruction.

The Conference also covered a number of technical themes: the criteria on which the international importance of a wetland should be judged; the status of wetlands and waterfowl, particularly in western Asia; the management of wetlands in arid countries, and the collation of the data necessary for the rational use of waterfowl stocks. This latter is but the first step towards international agreement on shooting seasons and other reasonable limitations to the numbers killed. It was clear that such controls were much more needful in some 'flyways' than in others.

Conference study tours were arranged in Gilan near Ramsar, in the Mian Koleh/Gorgan Bay area in the south-east corner of the Caspian and in the southern part of Iran, near Shiraz. There the great salt lake complex Tashk/Bakhtegan was visited and also the Dasht-e-Arjan and Lake Parishan area. The participants were privileged to see many wonderful places and birds—pelicans, flamingos, Lesser White-fronted Geese, Ruddy Shelduck, Marbled Teal, White-headed Duck,

Common Cranes, White Storks, White-tailed Eagles, Little Bustards, to mention but a few of the most spectacular. One of the most encouraging observations was that of more than 12,000 Marbled Teal in Khuzestan on the Iraqi border.

The Final Act and Summary Record were published in June and the full Proceedings are expected to be in print before the end of 1971. Both will be obtainable from I.W.R.B. Headquarters, Slimbridge.

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE ESPECIALLY AS WATERFOWL HABITAT

The Contracting Parties,
Recognising the interdependence of Man and his environment;

Considering the fundamental ecological functions of wetlands as regulators of water regimes and as habitats supporting a characteristic flora and fauna, especially waterfowl;

Being convinced that wetlands constitute a resource of great economic, cultural, scientific and recreational value, the loss of which would be irreparable;

Desiring to stem the progressive encroaching on and loss of wetlands now and in the future;

Recognising that waterfowl in their seasonal migrations may transcend frontiers and so should be regarded as an international resource;

Being confident that the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna can be ensured by combining far-sighted national policies with co-ordinated international action;

Have agreed as follows:

Article 1

- 1 For the purpose of this Convention wetlands are areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.
- 2 For the purpose of this Convention waterfowl are birds ecologically dependent on wetlands.

Article 2

- 1 Each Contracting Party shall designate suitable wetlands within its territory for inclusion in a List of Wetlands of International Importance, hereinafter referred to as "the List", which is maintained by the bureau established under Article 8. The boundaries of each wetland shall be precisely described and also delimited on a map and they 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, especially where these have importance as waterfowl habitats.

- 2 Wetlands should be selected for the List on account of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology. In the first instance wetlands of international importance to waterfowl at any season should be included.
- 3 The inclusion of a wetland in the List does not prejudice the exclusive sovereign rights of the Contracting Party in whose territory the wetland is situated.
- 4 Each Contracting Party shall designate at least one wetland to be included in the List when signing this Convention or when depositing its instrument of ratification or accession, as provided in Article 9.
- 5 Any Contracting Party shall have the right to add to the List further wetlands situated within its territory, to extend the boundaries of those wetlands already included by it in the List, or, because of its urgent national interests, to delete or restrict the boundaries of wetlands already included by it in the List and shall, at the earliest possible time, inform the organization or government responsible for the continuing bureau duties specified in Article 8 of any such changes.
- 6 Each Contracting Party shall consider its international responsibilities for the conservation, management and wise use of migratory stocks of waterfowl, both when designating entries for the List and when exercising its right to change entries in the List relating to wetlands within its territory.

Article 3

- 1 The Contracting Parties shall formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List, and as far as possible the wise use of wetlands in their territory.

- 2 Each Contracting Party shall arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. Information on such changes shall be passed without delay to the organization or government responsible for the continuing bureau duties specified in Article 8.

Article 4

- 1 Each Contracting Party shall promote the conservation of wetlands and waterfowl by establishing nature reserves on wetlands, whether they are included in the List or not, and provide adequately for their wardening.
- 2 Where a Contracting Party in its urgent national interest, deletes or restricts the boundaries of wetland included in the List, it should as far as possible compensate for any loss of wetland resources, and in particular it should create additional nature reserves for waterfowl and for the protection, either in the same area or elsewhere, of an adequate portion of the original habitat.
- 3 The Contracting Parties shall encourage research and the exchange of data and publications regarding wetlands and their flora and fauna.
- 4 The Contracting Parties shall endeavour through management to increase waterfowl populations on appropriate wetlands.
- 5 The Contracting Parties shall promote the training of personnel competent in the fields of wetland research, management and wardening.

Article 5

The Contracting Parties shall consult with each other about implementing obligations arising from this Convention especially in the case of a wetland extending over the territories of more than one Contracting Party or where a water system is shared by Contracting Parties. They shall at the same time endeavour to co-ordinate and support present and future policies and regulations concerning the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna.

Article 6

- 1 The Contracting Parties shall, as the necessity arises, convene Conferences

on the Conservation of Wetlands and Waterfowl.

- 2 These Conferences shall have an advisory character and shall be competent *inter alia*:

(a) to discuss the implementation of this Convention;

(b) to discuss additions to and changes in the List;

(c) to consider information regarding changes in the ecological character of wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Article 3;

(d) to make general or specific recommendations to the Contracting Parties regarding the conservation, management and wise use of wetlands and their flora and fauna;

(e) to request relevant international bodies to prepare reports and statistics on matters which are essentially international in character affecting wetlands.

- 3 The Contracting Parties shall ensure that those responsible at all levels for wetlands management shall be informed of, and take into consideration, recommendations of such Conferences concerning the conservation, management and wise use of wetlands and their flora and fauna.

Article 7

- 1 The representatives of the Contracting Parties at such Conferences should include persons who are experts on wetlands or waterfowl by reason of knowledge and experience gained in scientific, administrative or other appropriate capacities.

- 2 Each of the Contracting Parties represented at a Conference shall have one vote, recommendations being adopted by a simple majority of the votes cast, provided that not less than half the Contracting Parties cast votes.

Article 8

- 1 The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources shall perform the continuing bureau duties under this Convention until such time as another organization or government is appointed by a majority of two-thirds of all Contracting Parties.

- 2 The continuing bureau duties shall be, *inter alia*:

(a) to assist in the convening and

organizing of Conferences specified in Article 6;

(b) to maintain the List of Wetlands of International Importance and to be informed by the Contracting Parties of any additions, extensions, deletions or restrictions concerning wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with Paragraph 5 of Article 2;

(c) to be informed by the Contracting Parties of any changes in the ecological character of wetlands included in the List provided in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Article 3;

(d) to forward notification of any alterations to the List, or changes in character of wetlands included therein, to all Contracting Parties and to arrange for these matters to be discussed at the next Conference;

(e) to make known to the Contracting Party concerned, the recommendations of the Conferences in respect of such alterations to the List or of changes in the character of wetlands included therein.

Article 9

1 This Convention shall remain open for signature indefinitely.

2 Any member of the United Nations or of one of the Specialized Agencies or of the International Atomic Energy Agency or Party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice may become a party to this Convention by:

(a) signature without reservation as to ratification;

(b) signature subject to ratification followed by ratification;

(c) accession.

3 Ratification or accession shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument of ratification or accession with the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (hereinafter referred to as 'the Depository').

Article 10

1 This Convention shall enter into force four months after seven States have

become Parties to this Convention in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Article 9.

2 Thereafter this Convention shall enter into force for each Contracting Party four months after the day of its signature without reservation as to ratification, or its deposit of an instrument of ratification or accession.

Article 11

1 This Convention shall continue in force for an indefinite period.

2 Any Contracting Party may denounce this Convention after a period of five years from the date on which it entered into force for that Party by giving written notice thereof to the Depository. Denunciation shall take effect four months after the day on which notice thereof is received by the Depository.

Article 12

1 The Depository shall inform all States that have signed and acceded to this Convention as soon as possible of:

(a) signatures to this Convention;

(b) deposits of instruments of ratification of this Convention;

(c) deposits of instruments of accession to this Convention;

(d) the date of entry into force of this Convention;

(e) notifications of denunciation of this Convention.

2 When this Convention has entered into force, the Depository shall have it registered with the Secretariat of the United Nations in accordance with Article 102 of the Charter.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned, being duly authorized to that effect, have signed this Convention.

DONE at
this day
of 19.....,
in a single original in the English, French,
German and Russian languages, in any
case of divergency the English text
prevailing, which shall be deposited with
the Depository which shall send true
copies thereof to all Contracting Parties.