

Five more Indian wetlands got international tag of Ramsar sites

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In news– India has recently added **five more Ramsar sites, or wetlands that are of international importance**, bringing the number of such sites to 54 on International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem(July 26).

Key updates-

- With five new sites added to the list, India's Ramsar wetlands are spread over 11,000 sq km around 10% of the total wetland area in the country across 18 States.
- **No other South Asian country has as many sites** though this has much to do with India's geographical breadth and tropical diversity.
- The United Kingdom (175) and Mexico (142) **smaller countries than India have the maximum Ramsar sites** whereas **Bolivia spans the largest area with 148,000 sq km** under the Convention protection.
- The National Wetland Inventory and Assessment compiled by the Indian Space Research Organisation, estimates India's wetlands to span around 1,52,600 square kilometres which is 4.63% of the total geographical area of the country.
- A little over two-fifths are inland natural wetlands and about a quarter are coastal wetlands. India has 19 types of wetlands whereas Gujarat has the maximum area followed by Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.
- Wetlands in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat serve as important spaces for migratory birds.
- Five new sites are the Karikili Bird Sanctuary,

Pallikaranai Marsh Reserve Forest and Pichavaram Mangrove in Tamil Nadu, the Sakhya Sagar in Madhya Pradesh and Pala Wetland in Mizoram.

India's five new Ramsar sites-

Karikili Bird Sanctuary:

- Located in the Kancheepuram district, the **Karikili Bird Sanctuary** hosts more than 100 bird species.
- Several migratory birds including duck species from Europe and Central Asia such as Northern Pintail, Garganey, and Palearctic waders like Common Sandpiper migrate to Karikili during the winters.

Pallikaranai wetland:

- The **Pallikaranai wetland(700-hectare)** is a **freshwater marsh in Chennai** and is located adjacent to the Bay of Bengal. It is said to be the **city's only surviving wetland ecosystem**.
- It is one of the 94 identified wetlands under National Wetland Conservation and Management Programme (NWCMP) operationalised by the Government of India in 1985–86 and one of the three in the state of Tamil Nadu, the other two being Point Calimere and Kazhuveli.
- The topography of the swamp is such that it always retains some storage, thus forming an aquatic ecosystem.
- A project on 'Inland Wetlands of India' commissioned by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India had prioritised Pallikaranai marsh as one of the most significant wetlands of the country.

Pichavaram:

- Separated from the sea by a sandbar, **Pichavaram is one of the largest Mangrove forests in India**. It is also home to nearly 180 species.

- **Pichavaram mangrove forest is located between two prominent estuaries**, the Vellar estuary in the north and Coleroon estuary in the south.
- The Vellar-Coleroon estuarine complex **forms the Killai backwater and Pichavaram mangroves.**
- The backwaters are **interconnected by the Vellar and Coleroon river systems** and offer abundant scope for water sports such as rowing, kayaking and canoeing.

Sakhya Sagar Lake:

- A major tourist spot, the **Sakhya Sagar Lake in MP's Shivpuri** borders the forests of the **Madhav National Park.**
- Along with the Madhav Sagar Lakes, Sakhya Sagar Lake was created from the Manier river in 1918.
- It has an abundant population of marsh crocodiles.
- The lake happens to be now the **second such site from Madhya Pradesh included in the list of Ramsar sites 20 years after Bhopal upper lake** was included in the list as the first such site from Madhya Pradesh.

Pala Lake:

- Situated in Mizoram's Siaha district, **Pala Tipu/Pala Lake is fed by water from two nearby rivers.** In the local language, Pala translates to the **"swallowing lake."**
- It is an oval shaped water body almost 800 meters long with a width of 700 metres and is estimated to be easily 30 to 40 metres deep.
- Legend has it that a mythical creature in the form of a very huge serpent resided under a rock covering the entire area where the Pala Tipu stands today.

Ramsar convention-

- **The Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national**

action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

- The international treaty is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran where the convention was signed on February 2, 1971.
- It was originally contracted by seven countries when it came into force on December 21, 1975.
- **It is the only global treaty that focuses specifically on wetlands.**
- **The convention's contracting parties' or the countries which have agreed to be a part of this international treaty are committed to three objectives:**
 - Work towards the wise use of all their wetlands.
 - Designate suitable wetlands for the list of Wetlands International Importance and ensure their effective management.
 - Cooperate internationally on transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems and shared species.
- **To be Ramsar site, however, it must meet at least one of nine criteria as defined by the Ramsar Convention**, such as supporting vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities or, if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds or, is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks are dependent upon.

National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Eco-systems (NPCA)

- The environment ministry is currently implementing a centrally sponsored scheme namely NPCA for conservation and management of identified wetlands (including lakes) in the country on cost-sharing basis between central government and respective state governments.

- The scheme covers various activities such as interception, diversion and treatment of wastewater, shoreline protection, lakefront development, in-situ cleaning i.e., desilting and de-weeding, stormwater management, bioremediation, etc.

International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem-

- It is celebrated every year on 26 July, and aims to raise awareness of the importance of mangrove ecosystems as “a unique, special and vulnerable ecosystem” and to promote solutions for their sustainable management, conservation and uses.
- This International Day was adopted by the General Conference of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2015.

Further reading:
<https://journalsofindia.com/four-new-wetlands-in-india-added-to-ramsar-list/>