



COP14, short for the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, is being held and will last through to Nov 13. Its main sessions are held in Wuhan, capital city of Central China's Hubei province, and sideline meetings in Geneva, Switzerland. It is the first time for China to host such a conference of the contracting parties to the convention, an intergovernmental treaty that was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in February 1971 and came into force in December 1975. The Convention on Wetlands provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources through local and national actions and international cooperation. Every three years, representatives of the contracting parties meet at the COP, where they adopt decisions on the administration of the convention and guide its implementation. Currently, there are 172 contracting parties to the convention. China joined the multilateral environmental convention in 1992. Since then, the country has taken an active part in international cooperation in wetland preservation, protection and promotion. Its efforts include the adoption of the Wetland Protection Law and related regulations, launching wetland surveys, and implementing programs for wetland protection and rehabilitation, as well as expanding international cooperation and exchanges, contributing Chinese solutions to the global community.

Wonderful

With a rich variety and broad distribution of wetland resources, ranging from cool temperate to tropical regions, from plains to plateaus and mountainous areas, China has long valued the protection of this unique type of ecosystem. Since the State Council, China's Cabinet, issued a national wetland conservation plan in 2003, the central government has spent 19.8 billion yuan (\$2.73 billion) in wetland conservation and restoration. That includes implementing more than 4,100 wetland restoration projects. With continuous improvements in wetland conditions, the restoration efforts in the country have shifted from rescue to comprehensive protection. To date, the country has established a multifaceted wetland protection and management system, which includes 64 Wetlands of International Importance and 901 national wetland parks.



64 Wetlands of International Importance in China

The Convention on Wetlands' contracting parties are to place suitable wetlands onto the List of Wetlands of International Importance, also known as the Ramsar Sites. The convention has several mechanisms to help contracting parties designate their most significant wetlands as Ramsar Sites, and to take action to manage them effectively, maintaining their ecological character. There are over 2,400 Ramsar Sites across the world, covering more than 2.5 million square kilometers. Of them, 64 are located in China, covering a combined area of 73,200 sq km.

RESTORATION PROJECTS BOOST WILDLIFE PROTECTION

By HAO NAN
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China has taken diverse action to tackle global challenges such as shrinking wetlands and the degradation of their ecological functions since its accession to the Convention on Wetlands in 1992. The country has experienced three stages of wetland protection over the past three decades — baseline inventory and foundation consolidation from 1992 to 2003; rescue protection of wetlands from 2004 to 2015; and comprehensive protection from 2016 to 2021. The Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental agreement that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and use of wetlands and their resources. It had 172 contracting parties by the end of 2021. This year marks the 30th anniversary of China's accession to the treaty, and the ecological situation of wetlands in the country has been continuously improved. According to the white paper titled the Ecological Condition of China's Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), the overall ecological situation of these wetlands has remained stable, and their water quantity and biodiversity have been further improved. In 2003, the State Council issued the Plan for National

Wetland Protection Project (2002-30). The central government has so far invested 19.8 billion yuan (\$2.73 billion) in more than 4,100 projects for wetland ecological protection and restoration, and carried out these projects together with local governments. Last year, for example, some 3,188 hectares of degraded wetlands were restored, benefiting 16,700 rural households. By 2025, the country's wetland conservation rate is expected to increase to 55 percent. Also, China's achievements in such fields as wetland protection legislation, the protection of small and micro wetlands, international wetland city certification standards and procedures, and the construction of wetland parks have all played significant roles in the international community, said Zhang Mingxiang, vice-dean of the School of Ecology and Nature Conservation at Beijing Forestry University. "China is the first country in the world to complete three wetland resources surveys nationwide, and the third national land survey, which was conducted from 2017 to 2019, classified wetlands as the first-level land category enjoying special investigation. In addition, relevant research institutions and local governments have established wetland investigation and monitoring stations, and real-time monitoring and information management platforms. These stations and platforms are being included in the national forest and grass ecological network system and databases, in a bid to realize the integration of monitoring and supervision. George Archibald, a founder of the International Crane Foundation, said he has visited nature reserves in more than 50 countries and regions, and Xianghai is one of the few wetlands in the world with perfect natural landscapes, an original ecological environment and diverse wetland organisms. Qinghai Lake Bird Island Wetland is another Wetland of International Importance listed in 1992. As an important stopover for migratory birds, the wetland is witness to hundreds of thousands of birds each year. It is also the breeding ground for summer migrants. There are 227 species of birds in Qinghai Lake, including 50 species on the list of the China-Japan Agreement on the Protection of Migratory Birds, and 24 species included in the agreement signed by China and Australia to protect migratory birds and their habitats. In 2021, the water area of Qinghai Lake reached 4,625.6 square kilometers, an increase of 375.35 sq km compared with 2005. Billa River Wetland in North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region was listed as a Wetland of International Importance in 1992. The reserve, established in 1981, mainly aims to protect rare waterfowl such as red-crowned cranes and rare plants. It is also an important wetland for migratory birds to reproduce and refresh themselves during their journeys. It spreads across more than 100,000 hectares and covers 12 villages in Tongyu, featuring rich biodiversity such as



The Lushui Wetland in Hunan province is among China's 64 Wetlands of International Importance. YANG GUANGYI / FOR CHINA DAILY



An expanse of wetland in the Tibet Tairi Nam Co Wetlands. The Wetland of International Importance in the Tibet autonomous region features rivers, lakes and marshes. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

901 ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE PROMOTED ACROSS CHINA

By HAO NAN

China is home to more than 1,600 wetland parks, including 901 national wetland parks, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration. With a total area of 3.6 million hectares, the national wetland parks now cover 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities. They have contributed substantially to economic growth in surrounding areas. One of China's first national wetland parks, Xixi National Wetland Park in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province is known as the "kidney of Hangzhou" due to its cleaning properties provided by an abundance of water networks, rivers, ponds, moors, swamps and mud flats. However, in the 1990s, a large number of real estate developers were engaged in construction there due to urban expansion. Local farmers were also engaged in pig farming, which seriously polluted the water of Xixi. In 2002, the Hangzhou government decided to protect the Xixi wetland. It launched the first phase of the protection project in September 2003, with a series of measures taken. For example, more than 13,000 villagers were moved to a newly built community close to the wetland in the city's Xixi district. Some of them have since switched jobs to tourism service and trade.

A special plan for Xixi wetland's tourism has been issued, with ecological protection a priority. It highlights the conservation of original vegetation and landforms, and bans visitors from most of the wetland areas. The daily visitor flow in the remaining areas is limited to about 5,000 to 6,000. This ensures the wetland's water bodies can purify any natural waste produced by tourists. In addition to maintaining the wetland's ecology and water environment, the protection project has valued the wetland's role in scientific research and education. Five ecological protection and restoration areas were established in the first phase of the project, and a wetland science popularization and exhibition hall was set up at the park's entrance. The park is also home to the Xixi Wetland Museum, which was designed by the Pritzker Architecture Prize winner Arata Isozaki. The museum demonstrates the ecological diversity and cultural history of the wetland, and has become an important landmark. Official statistics showed that by the end of 2020, the Xixi wetland housed 711 vascular plant species, 480 more than that in 2005; 868 insect species, 421 more than in 2005; and 193 bird species, 114 more than in 2005. Another national wetland park is the Minjiangyuan park in Jianning county, Fujian province. The park covers a total area of 395.3 hectares, of which 241.48 hectares are wetlands. "We are all beneficiaries of the wetland protection drive," an official of nearby Quga village told Economic Daily.



A picturesque view of the East Lake National Wetland Park in Wuhan, Hubei province. The city is playing host to the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

13 CITIES FLOURISH THROUGH RESULTS OF CONSERVATION

By YIN YUWEI
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China is a vast country boasting diverse landscapes and mesmerizing geographical features. Of them, wetlands are of growing importance to make China a more beautiful land. There are 43 cities worldwide that hold Wetland City Accreditations, of which 13 are in China, the highest number of any country, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration. The accreditation is an honor for the protection of urban wetland ecology. It is given by the Convention on Wetlands, an intergovernmental environmental agreement. Wuhan, capital of Central China's Hubei province, is among the ranks of International Wetland Cities in China. It is playing host to the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands from Nov 5 to 13. "The main venue of the meeting is located near the Wuhan East Lake National Wetland Park, where delegates can immerse themselves in the scenery of the wetland, and perceive the city's progress in wetland ecological protection and restoration," Zhu Gongwei, deputy secretary-general of the Wuhan government, said at a news confer-

ence ahead of the event. "Moreover, the meeting will be held during the migration season, when the captivating sight of hundreds of birds in flight is expected to enchant delegates," Zhu added. Wuhan is a city of rich water resources. It has 166 lakes, 165 rivers and 1,024 square kilometers of wetlands, and is known as "the city of hundreds of lakes." Over the past few years, Wuhan has been committed to promoting wetland ecological restoration. A total of 10 wetland parks and five nature reserves were set up. The area of wetland has been maintained and water quality in urban areas was improved. The number of bird species in Wuhan reached 442, including 99 species on the national key protection list. In June, Hefei in East China's Anhui province was listed in the world's second batch of cities with the Wetland City Accreditations. Behind this title is the city's years of tireless efforts in wetland protection. Hefei boasts the Chaoshu Lake, China's fifth-largest freshwater lake, five national wetland parks and three provincial wetland parks. The total wetland area in the city is 118,300 hectares. Up to now, 10 wetland parks around Chaoshu Lake have been developed. A total of 4,335 hectares of wetland which were once either residential areas or farmlands have been returned to their original state. Pinglin in Liaoning province is also on the second list of International Wetland Cities. The coastal city standing at the Liaohé River estuary in Northeast China boasts



A bird's-eye view of village houses and rice paddies on the edge of Chongqing, the first metropolis in Southwest China with the title of International Wetland City. XINGBO WU / FOR CHINA DAILY

nearly 3,150 sq km of wetlands, including a Wetland of International Importance and a provincially important one, as well as nature reserves at national and provincial levels, and two pilot national wetland parks. The wetlands in Pinglin, a key stopover for migratory birds, provide habitats for 469 wild animal species, 78 of them under the country's priority protection. Since August 2018, the city has restored some 5,777 hectares of coastal wetlands and added 17.6 kilometers of new natural coastlines. The improvement of wetland ecology across the nation has required long-term efforts by ordinary people who devote themselves to wetland protection. Ji Jiaquan, a ranger with the Wuhan Anshan National Wetland Park, is one of them. He often works around the clock, and even through the wind and the rain, he sticks to his post, according to the park. He has a deep love for the birds in the park. He often carefully watches the birds with binoculars and tries to figure out their species. Once he was so focused on a bird that he accidentally fell into a pond. Li said that wetland parks in Wuhan have gained in popularity among the public and seen a growing number of visitors. To make visitors, who go to the lake to catch fish, or operate drones to take pictures, understand the importance of wetland protection, he takes a lot of time to explain relevant policies to them.



A highway bridge runs through an expanse of wetland lying in front of high-rise buildings in Hefei, capital of Anhui province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY