

INDIA ADDS FIVE MORE RAMSAR SITES

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Vital wetlands: A view of the Pallikaranai Marshland in Chennai. K. PICHUMANI PICHUMANI K

India has added five more Ramsar sites, or wetlands of international importance, bringing the number of such sites in the country to 54, Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav said on Tuesday.

“Delighted to inform that 5 more Indian wetlands have got Ramsar recognition as wetlands of international importance,” Mr. Yadav tweeted.

These are the Karikili Bird Sanctuary, Pallikaranai Marsh Reserve Forest and Pichavaram Mangrove in Tamil Nadu, the Sakhya Sagar in Madhya Pradesh and the Pala Wetlands in Mizoram.

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 U.K. (175) and Mexico (142) — smaller countries than India — have the most Ramsar sites, whereas Bolivia spans the largest area with 1,48,000 sq.km under the Convention protection.

Being designated a Ramsar site does not necessarily invite extra international funds, but the States — and the Centre — must ensure that these tracts of land are conserved and spared from encroachment. Acquiring this label also helps with a locale’s tourism potential and its international visibility. Until 1981, India had 41 Ramsar sites, though the past decade has seen the sharpest rise — 13 — in designating new sites.

Wetlands, according to the Environment Ministry, are an “area 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, but does not include river channels, paddy fields, human-made water bodies/ tanks specifically constructed for drinking water purposes and structures specifically constructed for aquaculture, salt production, recreation and irrigation purposes.”

To be Ramsar site, however, it must meet at least one of nine criteria as defined by the Ramsar Convention of 1961, 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.

The National Wetland Inventory and Assessment compiled by the ISRO estimates India’s wetlands to span around 1,52,600 square kilometres.

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