The Wetland Conservation Project is financed by the Ministry of Transport, Environment & Women's Affairs, Sri Lanka, and the Netherlands Government. Technical Assistance is provided by Euroconsult, Arnhem, the Netherlands.

WETLAND CONSERVATION PROJECT

The term wetland brings to mind such diverse landscapes as inland reservoirs, floodplains, river deltas, estuaries, coastal swamps and lagoons. All these wetlands have one characteristic in common, they all have permanently or seasonally an abundance of water on which many different life systems depend.

Wetlands in the tropics, and thus also those in Sri Lanka, are among the most varied ecosystems in the world. Their shallowness, high temperature, and profusion of light and nutrients guarantee a large biomass turnover and a wealth of plant and animal communities. Many species spend their entire life in a particular wetland, others live there only during a certain stage in their development (e.g. young fish), or for a certain period each year (e.g. migratory birds).

Wetlands are not only vital habitats for a large variety of plants and animals, they are also among the world's most productive environments, and thus are of great importance to man. For thousands of years, local communities have been dependent on wetlands for their traditional livestock herding, fishing and farming practices. Today some serve also as flood buffers, storage reservoirs, or are in use for research and recreation.

Many wetland ecosystems in Sri Lanka have been indiscriminately exploited for commercial, agricultural, residential and industrial development and, at an increasing pace, as dumping grounds for waste. In the common opinion wetlands are still wastelands and thus are considered to be reclaimable for economic benefits. However, an increase in environmental awareness among government and non-governmental organizations has resulted in the wish to sustain the ecological values of wetlands in Sri Lanka, thus resulting in the setting up of the Wetland Conservation Project (WCP).

Wetland Conservation Project, Central Environmental Authority, Maligawatte Secretariat, Colombo 10, Sri Lanka. Tel. 439073/4/5/6. Fax 439076
ACTIVITIES OF THE WETLAND CONSERVATION PROJECT

The general objectives of the Wetland Conservation Project are:
- to preserve Sri Lanka's variety of wetland ecosystems, in order to safeguard the country's biological and ecological diversity and genetic heritage;
- to strengthen capabilities of Sri Lanka's relevant authorities in conceptualizing, planning, implementation, and monitoring of natural resources management.

The first phases of the project (September 1991 - March 1995) achieved the following:
- establishment of a wetland unit within the Natural Resources Management Division of CEA;
- development of a national wetland strategy and of adequate wetland conservation methodologies, published in a manual;
- development of a wetland evaluation system, providing guidelines and criteria for selection of (parts of) wetlands for total conservation and for conditional exploitation;
- site surveys of 26 wetlands, followed by standardized publications; (please see attached list)
- detailed conservation management plans for nine important wetlands; these plans were partly brought under implementation;
- a number of public awareness activities, including the development of a system of community participation in wetland management planning.

Considering the successful progress of the first phases, a third phase was added (March 1995- December 1997). The activities in this phase partly accomplish those already started, but emphasis will be on the following:
- institutional strengthening of CEA in planning, coordination and monitoring of conservation management, and of the line agencies in implementation activities;
- implementation of a nation-wide programme for public awareness raising in wetland issues, and for community participation in wetland management (this programme includes construction of a visitor centre at Muthurajawela, as a tool for conservation cost recovery);
- investigation of the opportunities to found a nationwide foundation or society for financial support to conservation management.

Progress and achievements of the project will be highlighted in its monthly newsletter "Wetland News", that is available from CEA upon request.

LIST OF MAIN PUBLICATIONS

Technical Reports:
- TR4: Draft Institutional Action Plan for Wetland Conservation in Sri Lanka (IX-1993);
- TR6: Evaluation of WCP's Implementation Programme (II-1995)
- TR7: Preparation of WSR's and CMP's (VI-1995)
- TR8: Integrated Management of Coastal Ecosystem Biodiversity (X-1995)

Wetland Site Reports (WSR) and Conservation Management Plans(CMP):
- Annaiwilundawa Tanks (WSR/CMP, VII-1994);
- Annadhapura Tanks (WSR, VI-1994);
- Bellanwila-Atidiya Marsh (WSR/CMP, X-1993);
- Bentota Estuary (WSR, II-1994);
- Bundala Wetlands (WSR/CMP, XI-1993);
- Chilaw Estuary (WSR, V-1994);
- Colombo Flood Detention Areas (WSR/CMP, I-1995);
- Handapana & Bendiya Vilu's (WSR, II-1995);
- Karagaya Lewaya (WSR, III-1994);
- Koggala Lake (WSR/CMP, II-1994);
- Lunama & Kalametiya Kalapuwa's (WSR/CMP, II-1995);
- Mi Oya River Basin (WSR, IX-1994);
- Minneriya Reservoir (WSR/CMP, XI-1993);
- Mundel Lake + Corridor Channel (WSR/CMP, XI-1994);
- Multhurajawela/Negombo Lagoon (CMP, X-1994);
- Nachchaduwa Tank (WSR, XII-1994);
- Palapana Maha Lewaya (WSR/CMP, XII-1993);
- Puttalam Estuary (WSR, IV-1994);
- Senanayake Samudra Reservoir (WSR, XII-1993);
- Tabowa Reservoir (WSR, XII-1993);
- Udawalawe Reservoir (WSR, III-1994);
- Waturana Swamp Forest (WSR, II-1994);
- Wirawila Sanctuary/Yoda Wewa (WSR/CMP, VIII-1994);

All publications can be ordered from the CEA library, Parisara Mawatha, Maligawatte New Town, Colombo-10, Sri Lanka; fax (0094) 1 446749.