



## **Wetlands are our 'life insurance' against the combined climate and biodiversity crises, yet we persist in destroying them**

2022 is set to break all records - temperatures, heat waves, droughts - in Europe, revealing the vulnerability of our agriculture, our forestry management, our energy sources and our economies to these phenomena. Scientists have been predicting this for a long time but still it has been poorly anticipated in general.

This summer the Rhine, the Loire, the Po, the Yangtze and Parana... once so powerful rivers, have become ghosts slipping through a bed of sun-cracked sediments.

At the same time, reports are accumulating that the collapse of biodiversity, the living fabric of the planet, is accelerating. The number of vertebrate populations on the planet has fallen by 69% since 1970, and this collapse has reached 83% for freshwater species<sup>1</sup>, a sign of the massive destruction of wetlands.

These two crises, climate and biodiversity, are intimately linked and feed each other. They are the two facets of a systemic crisis which has its roots in our mistaken relationship with the living world. A relationship "against nature", against the millions of species of which we are an integral part, dependent and interdependent.

It is in this context of outstanding tensions that a series of unprecedented international events dedicated to nature and climate are taking place in the space of just a few weeks: the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) of the intergovernmental treaties on wetlands<sup>2</sup>, climate<sup>3</sup>, wildlife trade<sup>4</sup> and biodiversity<sup>5</sup>.

This gives us a unique opportunity to stop and reflect, to question the commitments, the ambitions and the articulations between these treaties... and to give a new impulse.

## **An urgent transition, but hampered with resistance**

There is no shortage of reasons to be concerned as these international meetings approach: The rate at which the world's wetlands are disappearing is not slowing down despite the repeated commitments of the States. A recent UNEP<sup>6</sup> report on climate shows that the international community's progress is "woefully inadequate" to create a credible course towards achieving the

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<sup>1</sup> WWF - Living Planet Report 2022

<sup>2</sup> Ramsar COP14

<sup>3</sup> COP27 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

<sup>4</sup> COP19 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

<sup>5</sup> COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Environment Programme

objectives of the Paris Agreement. The current decade is not unambitious enough and lacks a mechanism for state accountability.

### **Inventing a new way of sharing water by placing living beings at the centre**

Water grabbing in the plains in mega-basins or in the mountains to produce artificial snow, or agricultural or tourist actors who refuse to adapt to the inevitable changes. There are impossible trade-offs between crop irrigation, hydroelectric production, cooling of nuclear power plants, and domestic or industrial uses, all in a time when water scarcity puts into question the production and consumption models that have become our custom.

It is urgent to accept the obvious, to reconsider our relationship with water and with living beings, to change our behaviours which profoundly affect the great water cycle. Faced with growing needs and increasingly unpredictable and controllable water availability, we must reinvent how the water is used and shared, leaving nature its part. We should not consider nature as an adjustment variable for our production systems, but rather as the foundation of our lives and our economies.

### **Wetlands provide solutions to growing societal challenges**

Wetlands<sup>7</sup>, long perceived as unhealthy environments, are the most destroyed ecosystem on the planet, with declining rates that are three times faster than forests. But as they disappear, they are proving to be the most important contributor to humanity. More than a billion people depend directly on wetlands for their livelihoods and many more benefit from their extraordinary powers. They are the "kidneys of nature", purifying the water we pollute. Acting as gigantic sponges, they capture the increasingly irregular and often massive rainfall, attenuate flood peaks, recharge the water tables and support river flows during longer and more intense droughts. Hydrologists agree that the most effective and sustainable way to store water and make it available for a variety of uses is to ensure that groundwater and wetlands are fully functional and interconnected.

At a time when societal challenges - food security, climate change, water supply, human health, etc. – are the most important, there is an urgent need for massive wetland protection and restoration. These are highly effective, low-cost solutions with multiple collateral benefits. Nature-based solutions. Our life insurance.

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<sup>7</sup> Peatlands, lakes, marshes, lagoons, rivers, mangroves, ponds, alluvial valleys, deltas, estuaries...

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