

STATUS, CHALLENGES AND ASPIRATIONS OF WETLAND YOUTH

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DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to all the young people who are devoting their time, energy, spirit, and knowledge to protecting amazing wetland ecosystems. Through this report, we wish to recognize and shine the light on your efforts and your struggles, to build a strong community of young people that can support each other, to let you know that you are not alone in these efforts. Thank you for taking the time to share your story with us.

For us at YEW, reading the survey responses and developing the case studies has been an exhilarating experience. In all we sensed determination and relentless efforts in conserving wetlands around us. While we are marked by numerous differences in region and geography, we are bound together with untenable love for wetlands and a strong commitment to wetland conservation.



RECOMMENDED CITATION

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ABOUT YOUTH ENGAGED IN WETLANDS

Youth Engaged in Wetlands (YEW) is a **youth-led volunteer network** dedicated to the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Created in 2018, YEW's mission is to **provide a platform for young people to enable and empower them to help protect and promote wetlands around the world.** YEW's Mission and Strategy is aligned with the mission of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and our vision is to **be able to support the development of a formal mechanism within the Ramsar Convention** for the participation of youth and to be identified as the leading group in that context. The YEW core team is composed of 12 young professionals (volunteers) located around the world, working to reach the YEW objectives.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thank you to the YEW team members that helped prepare, translate, and send out the survey, Awawou Manouore Njoya, Priyanka Sarkar, Roger Delamou. Thank you to all the individuals that took the time to respond to the first-ever YEW survey, contributing to building a better understanding of the current and potential involvement of young people in wetland conservation.

We would also like to thank the Ramsar CEPA Government and NGO focal points and partners of different countries who took the time to forward the survey to different individuals. We are very appreciative of amazing ideas and tremendous work from Gab Mejia and Nic Fabian in designing and formatting the report.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, Youth Engaged in Wetlands (YEW) conducted an online survey to assess the status of youth engagement across wetland conservation and wise use around the globe. The purpose of the survey was to establish a baseline on the role of youth, the opportunities, and the constraints for them to work on wetland issues at local, national or international level.

The survey was published in English, Spanish and French and was available on the YEW website for 9 months. We received a total of **88 responses** from young people working in 31 different countries. Following the results of the survey presented in this report, a selection of case studies highlights the stories of youth respondents from different geographical regions. The collected data and this report are a **testimony to the interest and aspirations of youth working on wetlands**.

The results highlight the diversity of youth engagement in wetlands. Young people represented by the respondents of this survey are involved in a range of wetland activities and aspects of wetland conservation and wise use. Together, their work also covers a great diversity of wetland types. Nevertheless, the sex distribution of participants shows a **significant imbalance in the number of female participants**, with nearly 70% of respondents being male. While we received responses from each region, response rates from Oceania, Europe, and North America were significantly lower than from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Almost half of the survey respondents represent NGOs, highlighting the importance of civil society efforts.

Nearly 50% of the youth respondents stated working on Ramsar Sites, emphasizing the importance of Ramsar Site designations and the Ramsar Convention in youth work and vice versa. The respondents also reported a direct contribution in achieving a number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The overwhelming commitment of young people to work on wetlands and their desire to develop their capacity in different areas of wetland conservation shows that young people are committed and **aspire to lead even greater efforts**. The results indicate a strong desire to be part of a global network together with other wetland youth.

Together with youth achievements and aspirations, we also identify common challenges that youth face while working on wetland issues. In most cases, **lack of sustained funding, lack of awareness** of the importance of wetlands among different stakeholders as well as generally **unfavourable socio-political climate** are the common roadblocks that youth from different regions must face. At other times, young people face **life-threatening or dangerous situations** in their wetland work.

Together, the survey results and case studies confirm that young people are "**taking action for the wise use of wetlands**", responding to the mission of the Ramsar CEPA Program. This report provides a strong basis for the need to 1) Address youth in wetland agendas, 2) Foster their capacities, and 3) Involve youth in national and international decision-making around wetlands. Equally important is the need to **develop a network of youth at local, regional, and international levels** so that greater collaboration and learning-sharing among youth as well as with older generations is possible.



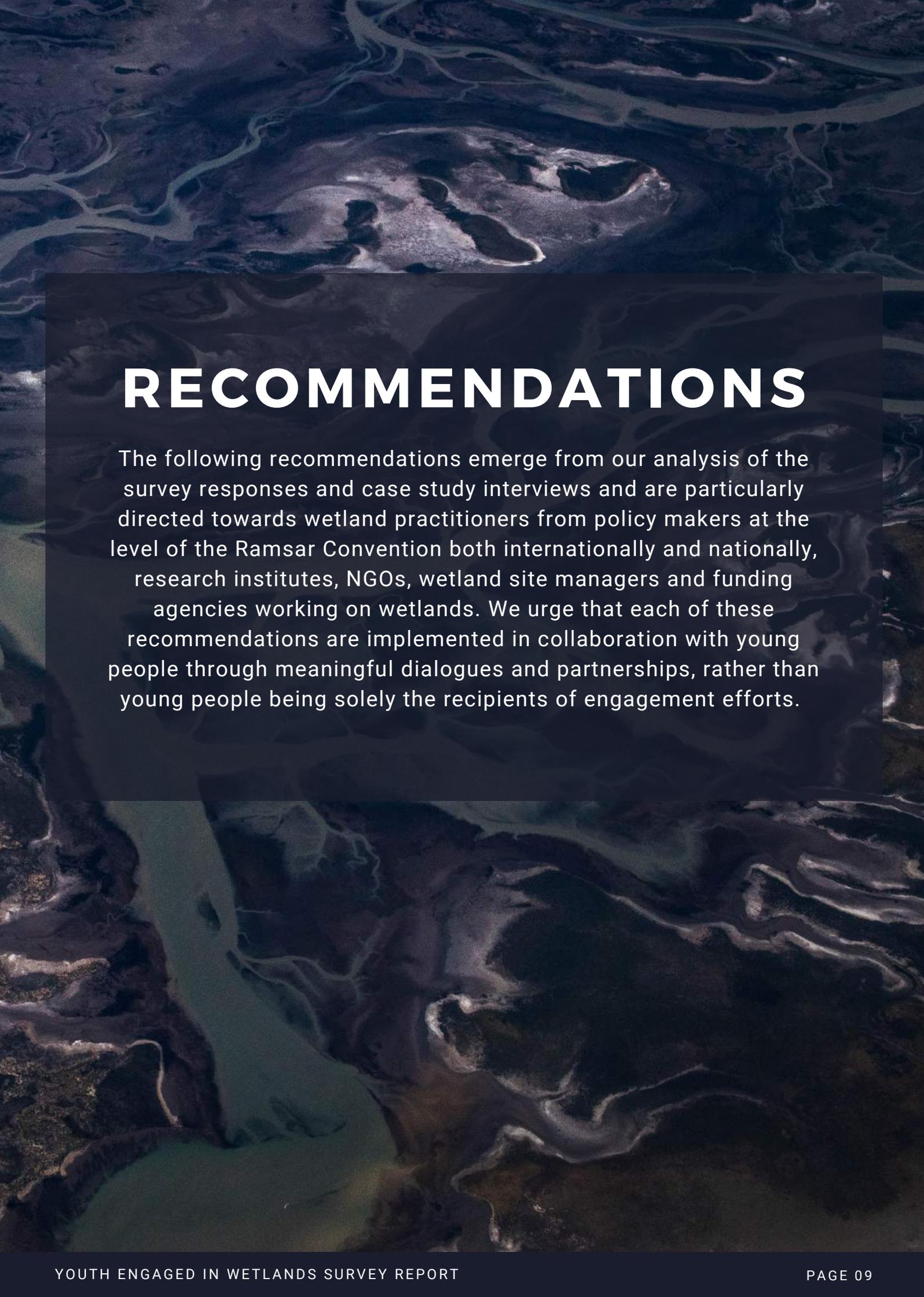
"YOUNG PEOPLE ARE TAKING ACTION FOR THE WISE USE OF WETLANDS"



SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL STRATEGIES FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION REQUIRE INCREASING RELIANCE ON LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND MAJOR INVESTMENT IN LOCAL CAPACITY.

Rodríguez et al. (2015): Globalization of Conservation: A View from the South





RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emerge from our analysis of the survey responses and case study interviews and are particularly directed towards wetland practitioners from policy makers at the level of the Ramsar Convention both internationally and nationally, research institutes, NGOs, wetland site managers and funding agencies working on wetlands. We urge that each of these recommendations are implemented in collaboration with young people through meaningful dialogues and partnerships, rather than young people being solely the recipients of engagement efforts.

Supporting youth and youth-led initiatives for wetland conservation and wise use

- Increase efforts towards empowering women and non-gender binary people and provide more examples and role models of wetland conservation work led by females and non-gender conforming people to increase gender diversity in wetland conservation.
- Support youth through tailored and meaningful capacity building, mentoring and practical or hands-on opportunities to ensure the sustainability of their projects.
- Provide tools to youth-led initiatives for effective and sustainable fundraising and while partnering with youth, explore with them direct monetary compensation or other appropriate forms of recognition for their work.
- Ensure the safety and wellbeing of youth working in wetland conservation, recognizing that in some places, wetland conservation work is dangerous and sometimes even life-threatening.



Youth as a key stakeholder of the Ramsar Convention

- Recognize that community-based projects led by youth are key in ensuring the health and protection of wetlands and that young people are key stakeholders for the Ramsar Convention *“taking action for the conservation and wise-use of wetlands”*.
- Increase awareness among young people of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, its processes as well as its application and relevance to all wetlands, not only Ramsar Sites.
- Meaningfully include young people in Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness raising efforts, acknowledging the strengths, knowledge and networks they provide to support the education of the wider population around wetland ecosystems, their conservation and wise use.



Intergenerational cooperation and decision-making

- Recognise that young people can create change at the international, national and local level given the appropriate conditions and that they must be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.
- Provide youth-friendly spaces for meaningful participation and intergenerational cooperation in national and international institutions and decision-making processes around wetlands so that together youth and non-youth can respond to the complex and evolving challenges of the wetland world.





BACKGROUND

Swamps, marshes, bogs, lakes, rivers, peatlands, salt marshes, salt ponds, karst systems, mangrove swamps, lagoons and estuaries, rice paddies, coral reefs - what do these ecosystems have in common? **All these places are called wetlands** - this critical transition between 'wet' areas and the 'land'. According to the Ramsar Convention, any land area saturated or flooded with water, whether permanent or temporary, natural, or man-made, is a wetland (Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2016).

Wetlands are one of the most important ecosystems of the world as they play a key role in climate change, hydrology, biodiversity, and human health and well-being. Wetlands are known to serve a **multitude of overlapping benefits**. Ranging from basic needs of food supply and drinking water, healthy wetlands prevent floods and can help protect coastal communities from severe weather events. As hotspots for biodiversity, wetlands are imperative to the survival of a number of species. They are global carbon storehouses, critical nature-based solutions in our fight against climate change. These overarching benefits can be visualized through the fact that wetlands contribute to **each one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals** and help inform 75 of 96 different indicators (Ramsar Convention, 2018). In monetary terms, ecosystem services provided by natural wetlands globally are estimated to be around 47 trillion (US Dollars) per year (Davidson et al., 2018).

Yet, at present, wetlands are also one of the most threatened ecosystems as we have lost 64-71% of wetlands since 1900 AD (Davidson, 2014). We are **losing wetlands at a rate three times faster than forests** (Ramsar Convention, 2018). In many places, wetlands are still considered as wastelands. Too often, a narrow range of economic benefits are prioritized at the expense of freshwater ecosystems, the habitats they provide, the flora, fauna and services they support (Tickner et al., 2020). Globally, the drivers of wetland loss and degradation include drainage and conversion of wetlands for agriculture, aquaculture or infrastructure development, pollution, invasive species, unsustainable extraction activities, inadequate water management and climate change (Ramsar Convention, 2018). Populations of freshwater vertebrate species reflect this habitat degradation decreasing two times faster than the rate of land and ocean vertebrates (Grooten and Almond 2018). The implications of wetland loss are **felt across multiple biophysical and social dimensions** and have **severe consequences** with regards to sustainable development and human wellbeing.

Globally, wetland conservation efforts require a **combination of strategies** from restoring and rehabilitating the wetlands that we have lost combined with protection of the critical habitats remaining and "wise-use" of all wetlands. The concept of "**wise-use**" of wetlands, is a term coined by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and acknowledges the number of services that healthy wetlands provide to people and the environment and equates to the sustainable use of wetland resources as a contribution to sustainable development (Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2010a). It is crucial to ensure that conservation efforts are grounded in science and supported and/or initiated by local communities whose livelihoods and wellbeing depend on these ecosystems (Valuing Wetlands, 2021).

In these efforts, **public participation at different levels of wetland management and decision-making is necessary** to reverse this trend of wetland loss and degradation and to achieve the global priorities set by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals, to name a few. Over the last 30 years, the recognition and participation of non-state actors within wetland management and decision-making has grown significantly, including within the Ramsar Convention (Hamman, 2018). Several guidance documents produced by the Ramsar Convention **encourage increased community participation** in wetland conservation such as the 1999 Resolution VII.8 “Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities’ and indigenous people’s participation in the management of wetlands”, the 2008 Changwon Declaration and the 2015 Resolution XII.9 “The Ramsar Convention’s Programme on communication, capacity building, education, participant and awareness (CEPA) 2016-2024”. The CEPA Program defined by Resolution XII.9 is regarded as a tool to help deliver the Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention. The mission of the CEPA Program is **“People taking action for the wise use of wetlands”** (Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2010b).

The scope of the current CEPA program and the various guidance documents provided by the Convention however do not fully explore the dimensions of youth engagement. This report hopes to shed some light on the **plurality of this form of public participation** and the opportunities that it provides to contribute in particular to the overall mission of the Ramsar Convention - in other words “young people taking action for the wise use of wetlands”. For the purpose of this report, we borrow from the propositions set by Checkoway (2011) to define youth participation as *“a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives [and] the active engagement and real influence of young people”* (Checkoway, 2011 p341).

It is well recognized that efforts initiated by young people around the world are vital to achieve these goals and to promote societal improvements (Earl, Maher and Elliott, 2017). The importance of youth participation is increasingly being recognized by various institutions and at different levels (Corriero, 2004). At YEW, we believe that the efforts for wetlands conservation that are led by youth are key in achieving conservation targets.

To meet the YEW mission of providing a 1) global platform for young people to empower them and 2) to protect wetlands and promote their conservation and wise-use around the world and 3) to provide recommendations for strengthening youth engagement especially in the context of the Ramsar Convention of Wetlands, we first needed to build an **understanding of the involvement of young people (18-35 years old) in different aspects of wetland conservation globally**. To that purpose, we at YEW prepared a survey to understand the commonalities, opportunities, and challenges that youth face while working on wetland issues. We wanted to learn about youth working in the frontlines of conservation, education, research, restoration, and wise use: the challenges that they have faced and their success stories.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is the outcome of an **online survey** that was available on the YEW website for a 9-month period between **January and September 2020**. We targeted the survey to **youth aged 18-35**. We also shared the survey with Ramsar Communication, Capacity Building, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) focal points (Governments and NGOs) and within our wetland networks. The survey was available in English, French and Spanish. In total, we received **88 individual responses from young people across 31 different countries**.

To our knowledge, this survey is the **first of its kind in terms of its focus on youth that are involved in wetland activities**. We acknowledge that the survey is self-reported and does not have a proportionate representation across the countries and the regions. We also acknowledge that the answers to the survey are limited to youth with access to internet, social media, and email and who have a certain degree of digital literacy, which is in itself exclusive. Nevertheless, the information that we have highlighted provides a **baseline on youth engagement in wetlands**, which we hope will aid in raising youth voices and fomenting youth advocacy in wetland issues.

This report is divided into three sections. The first section provides details on the characterization of respondents from different Ramsar regions on the basis of age, sex, and the nature of their work. The second section summarizes open-ended questions of challenges, motivation, the relevance of the Ramsar Convention to their work and respondents' aspirations. The third section highlights two case studies from each Ramsar region, illustrating the diversity of youth engagement for wetland conservation around the globe.



An underwater photograph of a coral reef. The foreground is dominated by a large, textured rock covered in various corals, including pink branching corals and yellowish-brown sponges. In the background, two divers are visible against the deep blue water. One diver is in the upper right, and another is in the lower right. The overall scene is vibrant and detailed.

KEY FINDINGS

A. OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

AGE RANGE

Even though the survey was targeted for 18-35 age groups, we received some responses from outside the target range. While we kept the outlier responses in age-distribution results, we removed them in all other questions. Eighty eight percent of the responses (88 respondents) fall within the targeted age range (Figure 1). 44% of respondents are between the ages of 26 and 30 years old.

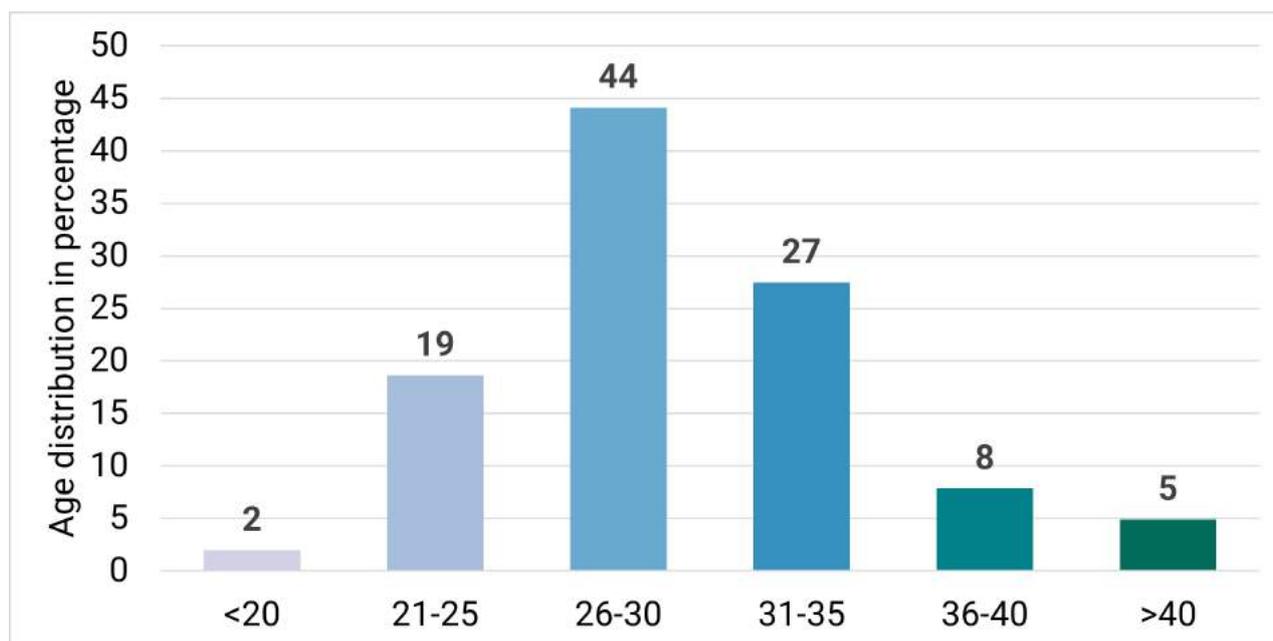


Figure 1: Age distribution of respondents

REGIONS

As shown in Figure 2, we received responses from all the Ramsar regions - Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Oceania. Figure 2 shows the response received from each country. Of the 88 responses, the Latin American and the Caribbean (30 responses), Asia (27 responses) and Africa (16 responses) regions has the largest number of responses. Comparatively, we received fewer responses from North America (7 responses), Europe (5 responses) and Oceania (3 responses).

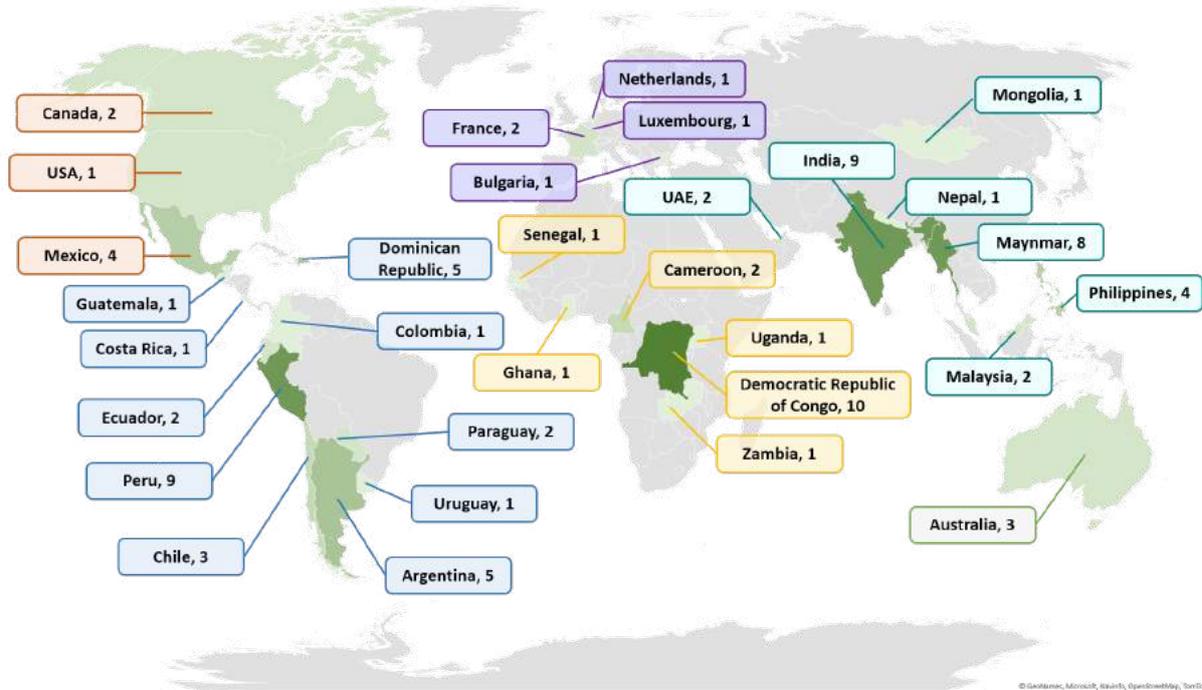


Figure 2: Countries and regions represented in the survey

SEX DISTRIBUTION

As shown in Figure 3, nearly seventy percent of the respondents are male showing a striking imbalance in terms of representation based on sex in the survey responses. Except for Oceania, for all other regions, the number of male respondents is higher than female and only one participant identifies as non-male and non-female. The proportion of male respondents is considerably higher than the average for the African region, with only two female respondents out of 16. This question asked participants to respond about their sex, which did not include gender.

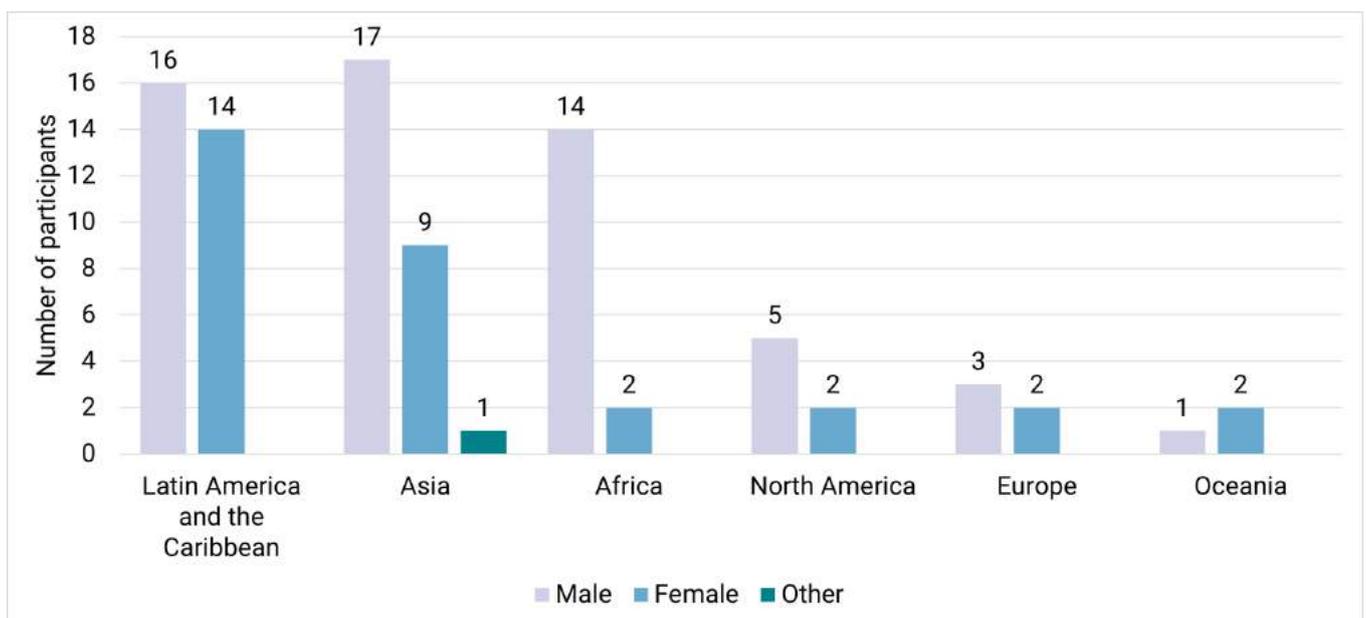


Figure 3: Number and sex distribution of respondents from different regions

B. NATURE OF WORK

WETLAND TYPE

We were curious to learn more about what type of wetland young people currently focus their activities. Over 70% of respondents indicate working on more than one wetland type, as shown in Figure 4. The most common wetland types are “Freshwater marshes”, “Riverine wetlands” and “Mangroves”, each representing respectively 35%, 28%, and 27% of responses. Among the other types of wetlands mentioned are four artificial or “man-made” wetlands including rice fields, aquaculture ponds and a sewage treatment plant. Other types of wetlands mentioned include three estuary systems, four lakes, two lagoons, one intertidal mudflat, urban wetlands, an inland saline wetland, and an arid wetland.

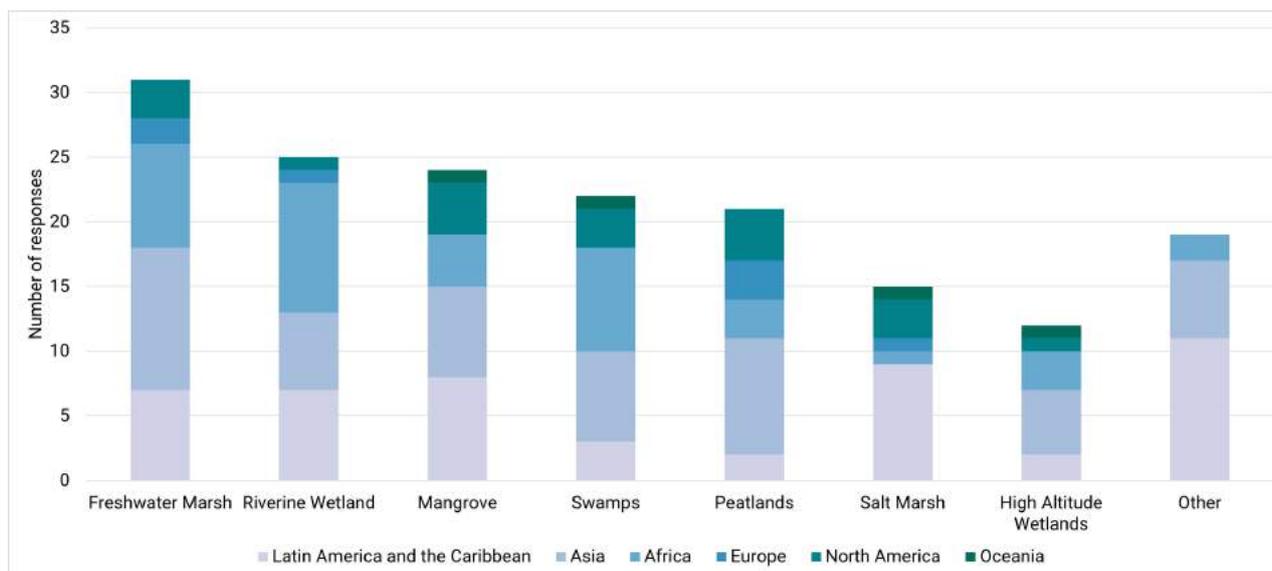


Figure 4: Different types of wetlands on which youth participants are working per region. We allowed multiple answers.

80% of respondents indicate that they are working on wetlands with at least one international or national designation (Figure 5). In most cases, these wetlands are covered by overlapping designations. Activities are most often focused on National Protected Areas, Ramsar Sites and Important Bird Areas, with nearly half of survey respondents working on Ramsar Sites. Further questions on the relevance of Ramsar Sites in individual projects are explored below.

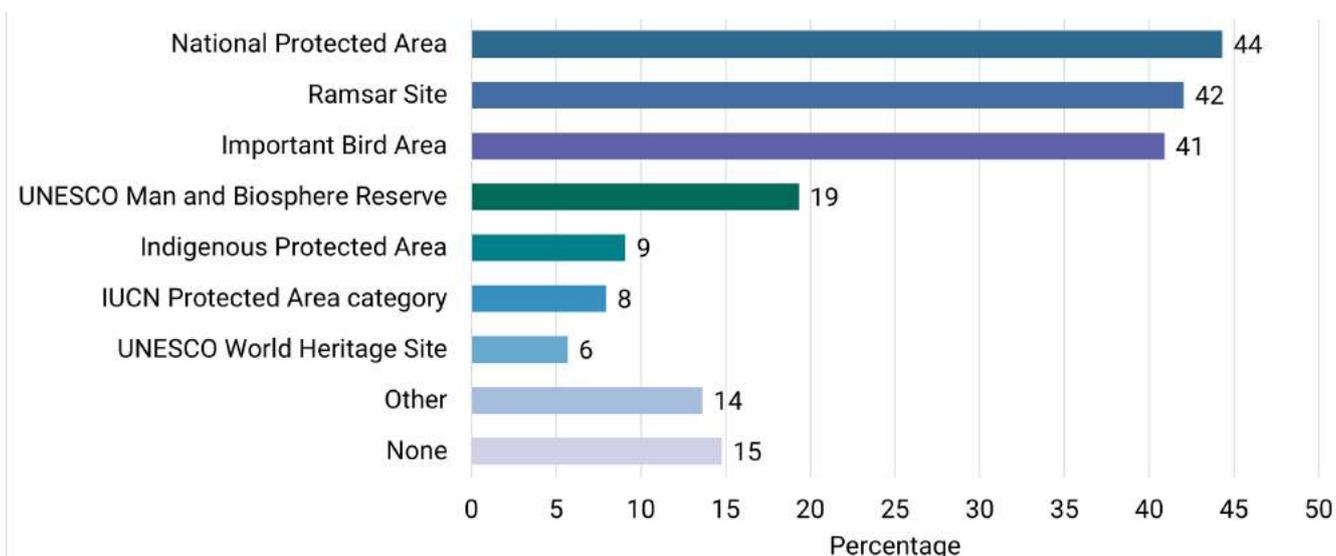


Figure 5: Designation of the wetlands that youth are working on. We allowed multiple answers.

TYPE OF ACTIVITY

Figure 6 illustrates the affiliation of the respondents. Almost half of the participants (41%) are affiliated with Non-Governmental Organizations. Similarly, research institutes, governmental organizations and international NGOs are also represented within our survey participants. Representation of government organizations comes from Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean regions.

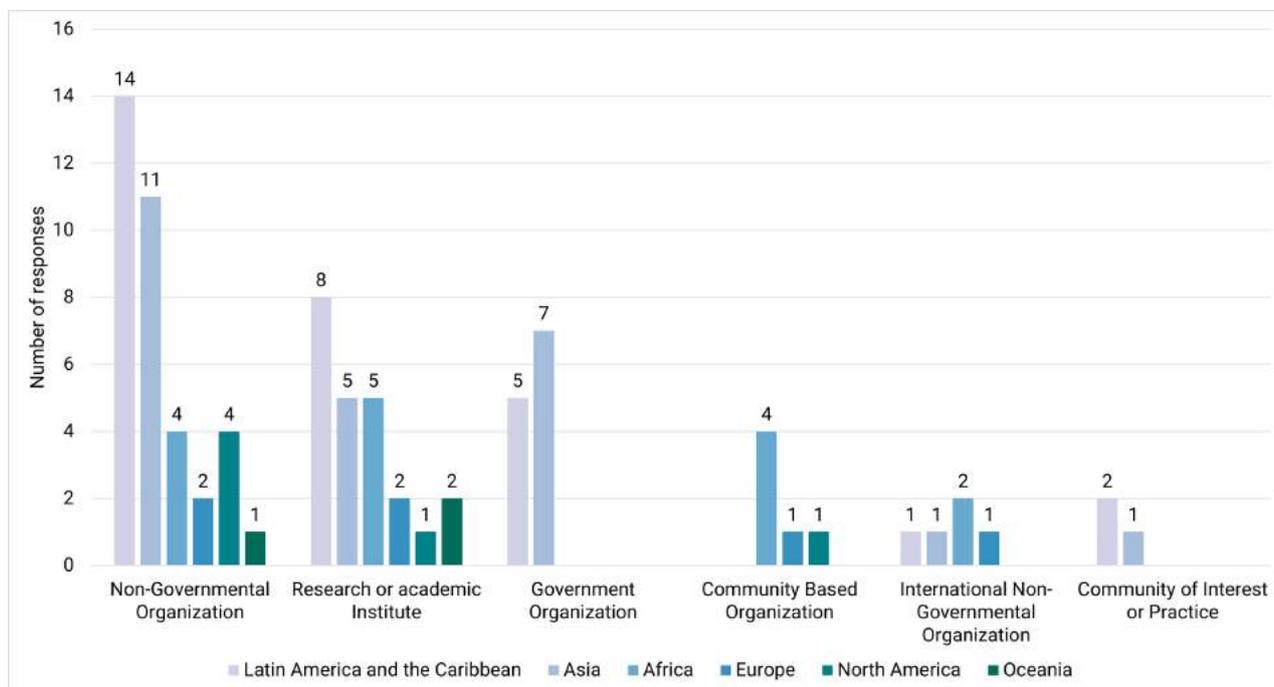


Figure 6: Affiliation of the respondents

For half of the respondents, wetland-related activities represent 50% or more of their workload as shown in Figure 7 (84 participants responded to this question).

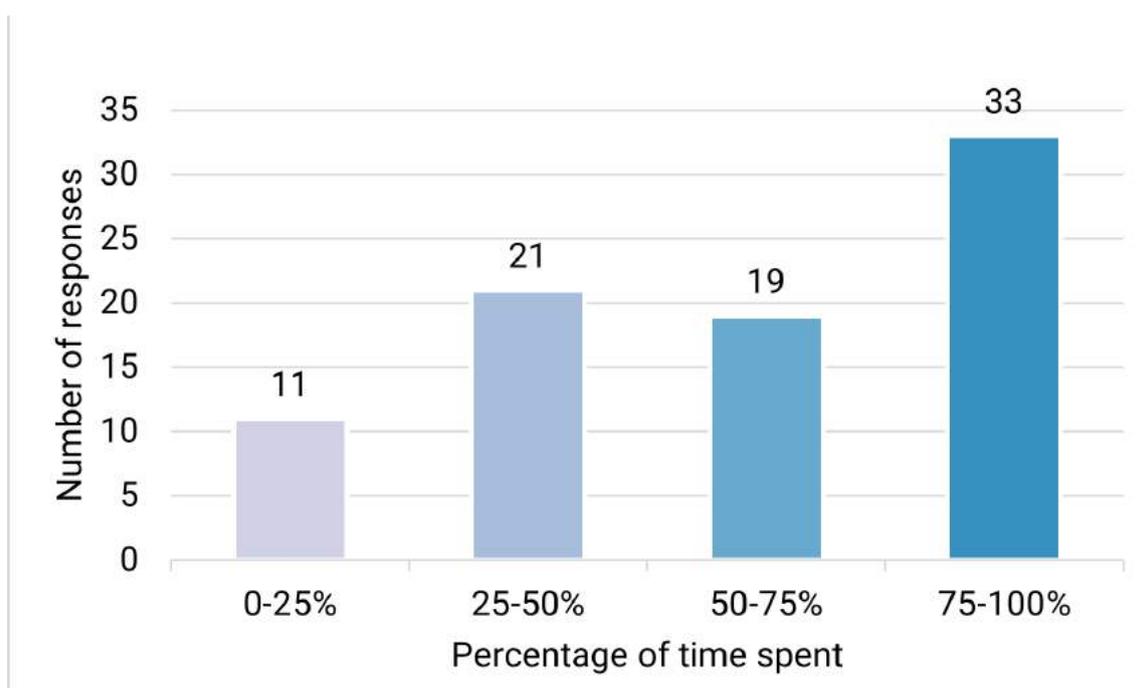


Figure 7. Percentage of workload spent on wetland activities

Respondents were presented with a multiple-choice list of 10 wetland-related activities to select from and one “other” where they could describe their activities. A large number of respondents (83%) lead more than one of these activities at a time.

All but 10 respondents report doing more than one of these activities (Figure 8). “Education and awareness”, “Research” and “Monitoring” are the activities that are most commonly encountered. Around 30% of the survey respondents are involved through “Volunteer” work.

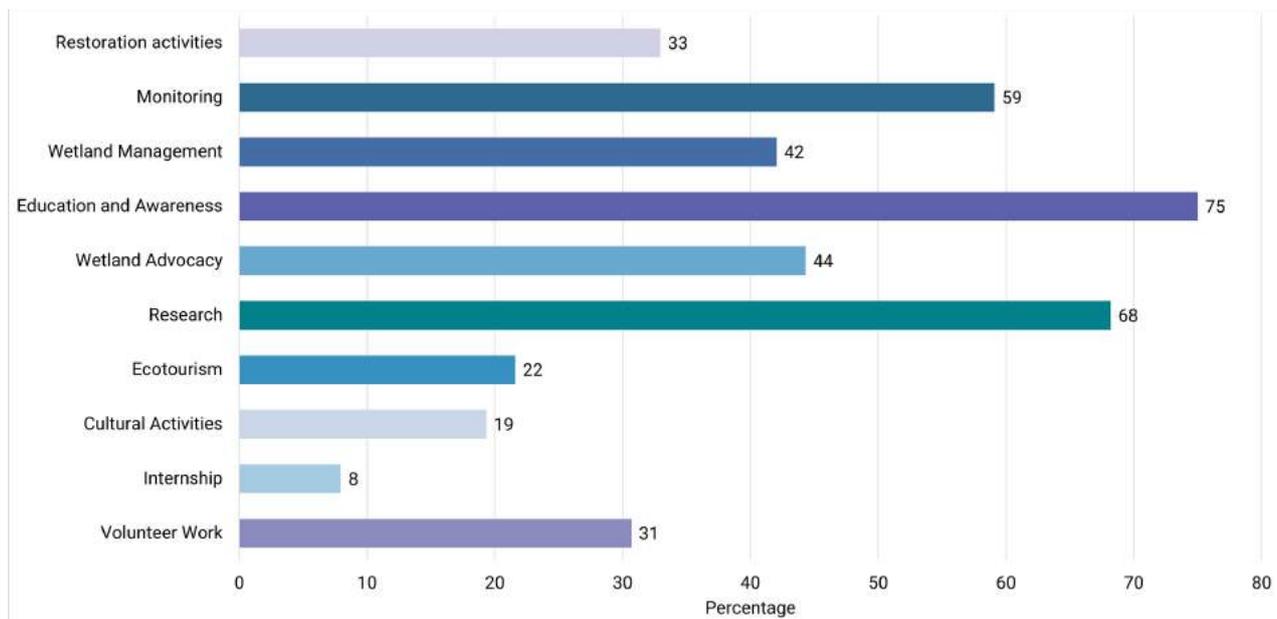


Figure 8: Type of wetland activity led by youth respondents. We allowed multiple answers.

Youth respondents are focusing on a diversity of wetland conservation and wise use aspects (Figure 9). “Biodiversity conservation” and “Ecosystem services” are the two most common areas of focus. Here again, respondents often focus on more than one of these aspects.

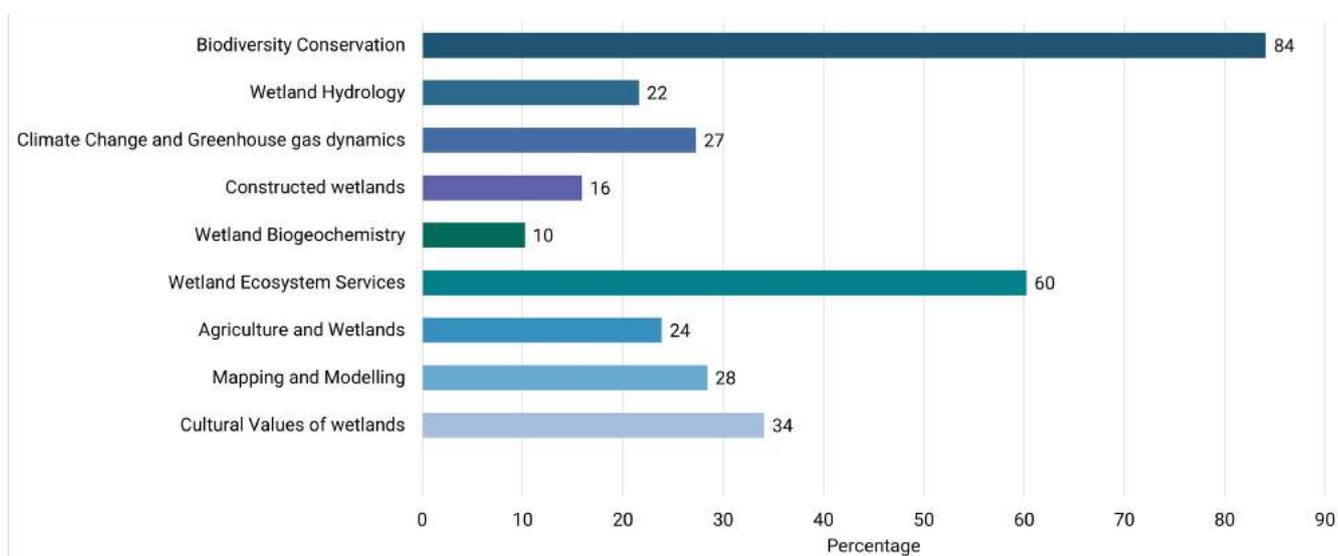


Figure 9: Aspect of wetland conservation and wise use on which the respondents are focusing. We allowed multiple answers.

C. CONTEXT TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

PERCEPTION OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

We invited survey participants to share their perception of the level of youth engagement within their research and conservation activities in their region and/or country. The following Figure 10 divides the response on the current status of youth engagement in wetlands at national level as reported by the respondents according to region. Lower value "1" corresponds to low levels of engagement and in increasing order, value "5" corresponds to high levels of engagement of youth in wetland activities. The most common response among all respondents is 3, implying that the respondents are neutral about the level of youth engagement in their country.

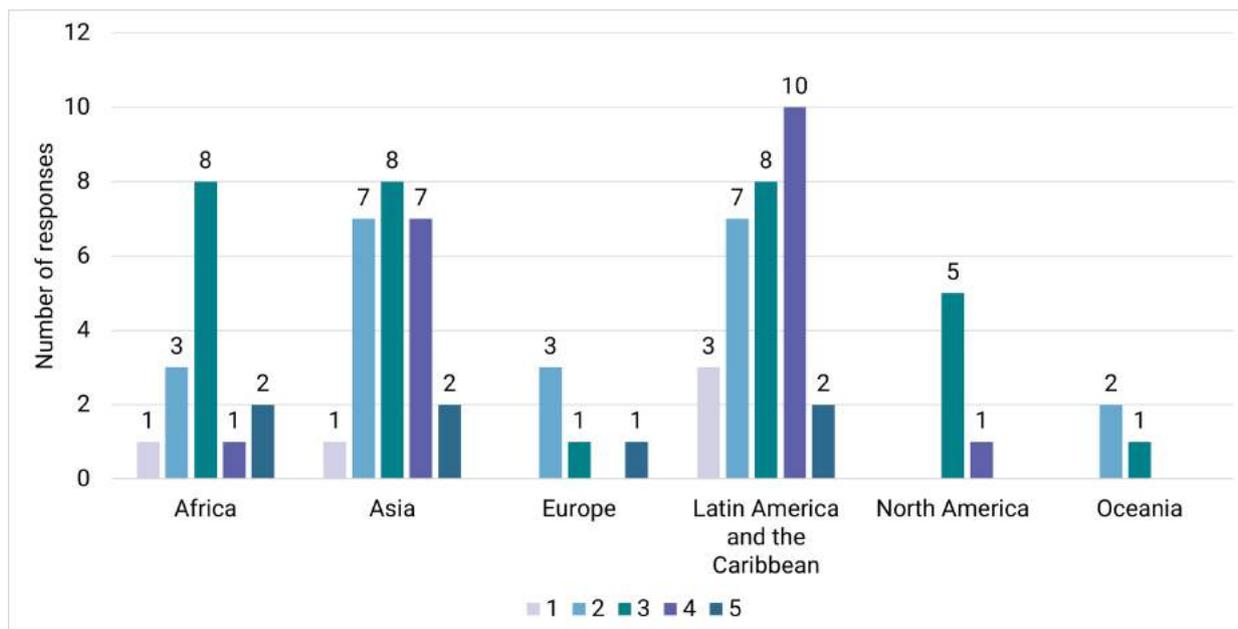


Figure 10. Rating of youth involvement across regions. 1- poor involvement, 5- Very good involvement

BARRIERS TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

From our initial discussions, having a reliable and sustainable source of funding was often raised as a limitation to carry out certain projects of interest. Figure 11 shows the current sources of funding received by the participants to carry out their work. In most cases, more than one source of funding is reported. The most important funding sources reported are "International donor-based funds" and "In-kind and volunteer support".

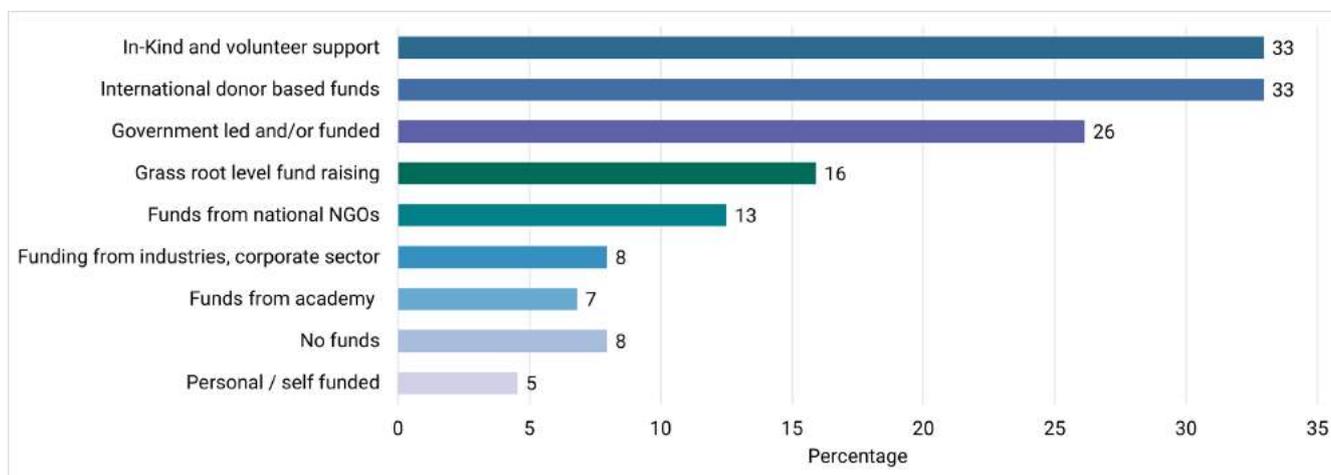


Figure 11: Source of funding for wetland activities. We allowed multiple answers.

The following Word Cloud (Figure 12) highlights the most prominent words mentioned by respondents concerning the challenges that they face in relation to working in wetland conservation. The size of the letter corresponds to their frequency of occurrence with larger letters indicating the most commonly occurring challenge.



Figure 12. Word cloud illustrating the challenges that the respondents are facing

Issues related to **funding** such as **unsustainable funding**, **short project-based funding** and **difficulty in securing funds** are the most commonly received responses, an issue raised by nearly half of all respondents (48%). While our study does not have good regional distribution, it is apparent that “funding” is a sizable challenge for respondents working in the African region (88% of African respondents) and to a lesser degree for respondents working in the Latin America and the Caribbean region (50% of Latin American and Caribbean respondents) and Asia (30% of Asian respondents), see Figure 13.

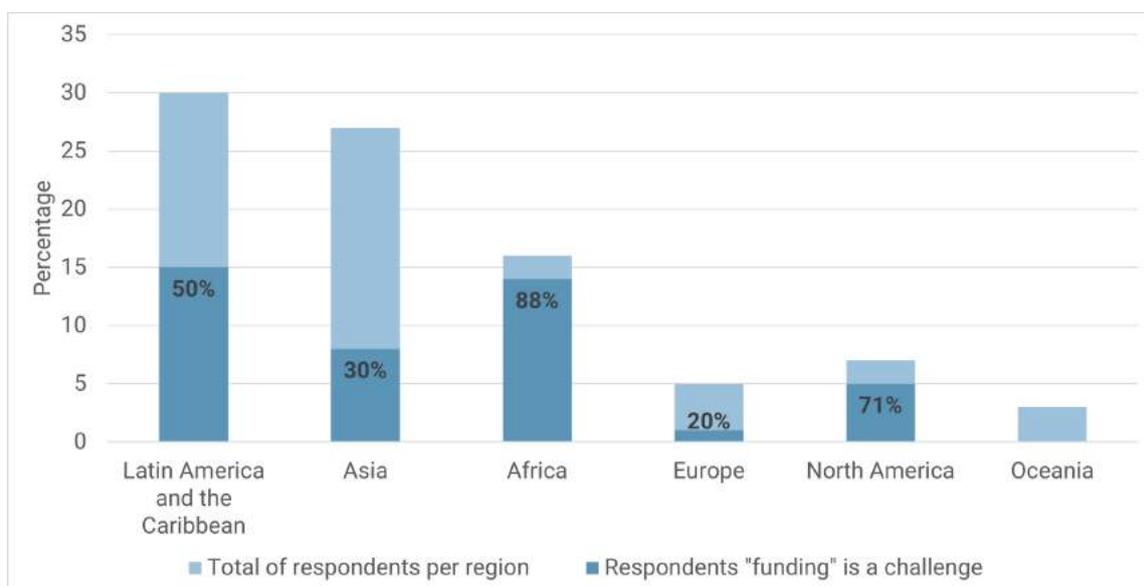


Figure 13. Regional distribution of “Funding” as a challenge for respondents

In addition, respondents also shared challenges related to the general socio-political climate for their conservation work. Respondents frequently mention **Lack of political will** and **interest** along with **lack of corporate will** to a lesser extent. One of the respondents from Zambia highlights the challenges related to the lack of commitment to the wetlands on behalf of different large companies. He adds :

"If only they could commit a small percentage of the profits towards wetlands restoration such as invasive species management, then wetlands will be well protected in the future."

Respondent from Zambia

The **lack of awareness, understanding and knowledge** of the importance of wetlands at the community level, political level and among different stakeholders are raised as common barriers for advancing wetland issues. Among these, participants indicate that wetlands are under threat by a number of factors such as agricultural expansion, unsustainable activities like overfishing, overexploitation of wetland species and pollution. Wetlands are complex in nature and their benefits are not only direct monetary value from provisioning services. Wetlands are crucial in providing regulating, supporting, and cultural ecosystem services. It is evident that awareness of the complexities and their direct and indirect benefits is yet to reach the desired level within communities and decision-makers.

Challenges related to **engagement** are also commonly reported. For instance, the mobilization of other young people around local wetland conservation and the engagement of local communities are a particular challenge for a couple of respondents. Maintaining commitment and engagement of the local community in the initiative is a challenge for a participant in India where COVID 19 brought another level of challenges to reach to the community:

"Online activities/orientation is not effective for these communities."

Adarsh, 26 from India



Similarly, Max (28, Luxembourg) explains:

"It is increasingly difficult to find people who are willing to commit themselves closely in the project and take care of administrative and organizational aspects of the project".

Max, 28 from Luxembourg

Max adds that an association or project needs a welcoming culture with positive vibes in order to attract young people who are willing to commit themselves more deeply.

Two respondents, including Maia from the Philippines, share the perceived **disconnection** between people and their environment further accentuating lack of awareness:

"There is an observed historical forgetfulness of mangroves in some stakeholder communities, e.g. not connecting that their barangay [an administrative division in the Philippines] is named for the local name of a mangrove species because it was abundant there at the time"

Maia, 24 from Philippines

Some common challenges are also related to the **lack of support** given that for some participants there is a need for **greater guidance** and **mentoring** as well as **capacity building** and **training opportunities**. For a few participants, the lack of **technical support** and **staff** also limit them in their activities.

Finally, while they are not the most common responses, it is worth mentioning a few other challenges stated by two individuals that relate to more personal challenges. One respondent highlights the **despair** that is felt at times around wetlands conservation, the emotional challenge that arises from seeing these places being degraded and feeling their efforts are useless. Another participant explains the **fear** and **life-threatening risk** related to their work in wetland conservation:

"There is fear of losing life during our field visits because of ongoing illegal activities. It becomes difficult for regular ecological data collections"

Respondent from India



RELEVANCE OF THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

Almost half of the wetland activities shared in this survey are carried out in **Ramsar sites** as shown in Figure 5. We asked the participants what the Ramsar Convention meant to them and if it had any relevance in their work. Over half of the participants are aware of the Ramsar Convention and its mission and feel that it was of relevance to their work.

Regardless of whether participants are working or leading research at a Ramsar Site or not, the designation of Wetlands of International Importance or Ramsar Site is highly valued among 24 participants:

"Ramsar helps in giving the Agusan Wetlands a label and high international value"

Gab, 24 from Philippines



"The Convention is for me a great ally in the conservation of these ecosystems, it pushes local authorities to be able to promote the protection of these ecosystems, highlighting their international importance"

Karol, 25 from Peru

"Plays an important role in justifying to the government to keep it protected"

Sameer, 19 from South africa



"Wetlands in our impact area are not classified as Ramsar Site, nevertheless this Convention is of great relevance for the conservation of wetlands at the global level"

Isabela, 26 from Dominican Republic

Five participants mention that they would like to see their wetland designated as a Ramsar Site or were currently working towards its designation. Four respondents indicate that the Ramsar Convention is not of relevance to their work because their wetland is not listed as a Ramsar Site.

The Ramsar Convention is also seen as an important **basis for promoting wetland conservation and wise use locally and nationally**. It is viewed by some participants as a way to **support the further protection of wetlands** and to **help in the creation of Protected Areas**:

"Being a Ramsar site, it was pushed to be designated as a Nationally protected area by Mongolian Government"

Vandandorj, 31 from Mongolia

The Ramsar Convention is also seen as having an **important awareness-raising role** with a couple of participants mentioning **World Wetlands Day** and the materials produced for environmental education and academic research. Several participants highlight the **guidance and recommendations that the Ramsar Convention provides**. Alejandro (28, Colombia), working in Mexico, says:

"The Ramsar Convention is the organism that has the capacity to make recommendations in terms of public policy for the conservation, management and restoration of wetlands [...] and give specific recommendations for wetland management at the local and regional levels."

Alejandro, 28 from Mexico

For others, The Ramsar Convention is also an **advocacy tool**, used to raise the visibility of wetlands to relevant authorities.

"We have used the treaty to petition our government to question the investors that are destroying our wetland"

Edwin, 30 from Uganda



Photo by CECIC, Uganda

Participants show high levels of awareness of the Ramsar Convention and highlight different dimensions of its influence based on their experience. A few share their interest in learning more about Ramsar.

We asked the participants to indicate whether their work related to any of the objectives of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024. The link to the **Strategic Plan poster** was provided through the survey. 22% of participants align their work to at least one of the goals of the Strategic Plan, with a greater number contributing towards Goal 1: “Addressing the Drivers of Wetland Loss And Degradation” (Figure 15). Overall, all four goals are shown to be relevant across different respondents.

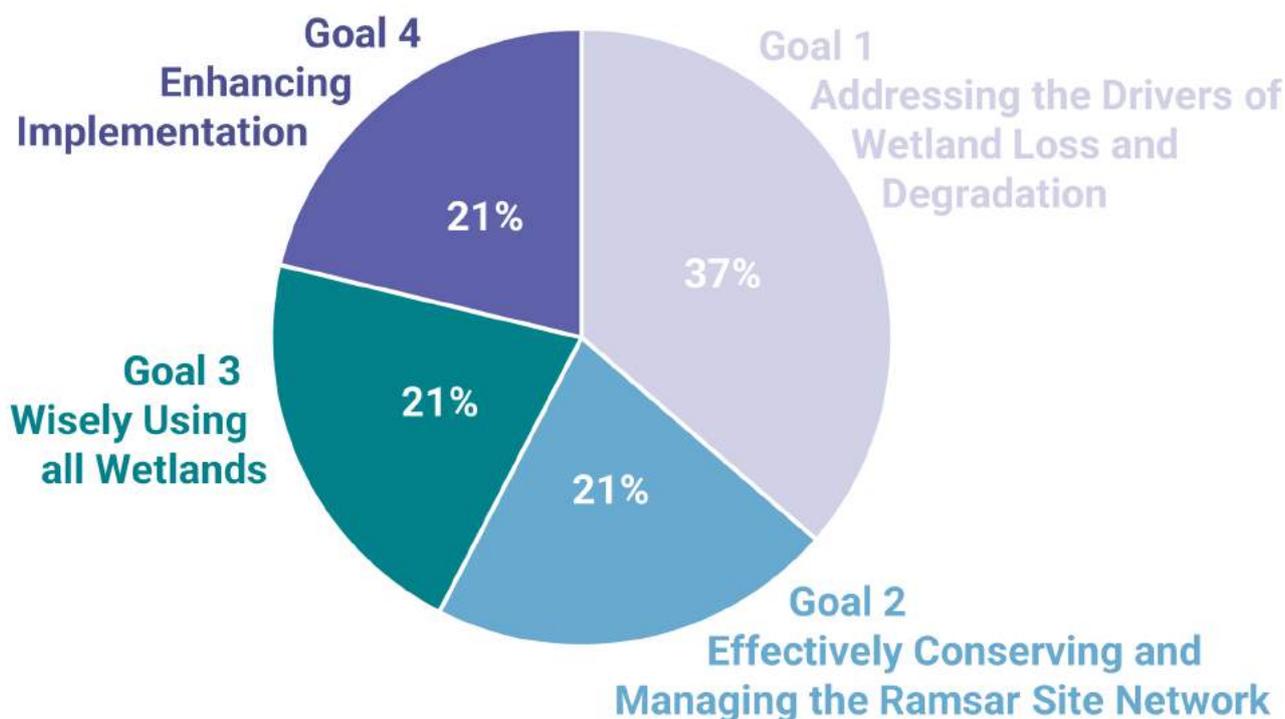


Figure 14. Contribution towards the Goals of the 2016-2024 Ramsar Strategic Plan.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN WETLAND CONSERVATION AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SDGs

We asked the participants to indicate the relevance of their work with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 (SDGs). 27% of all participants responded to this question indicating that their work relates to at least one goal. All SDGs are quoted at least once apart from SDG 8 “Decent work and economic growth”, SDG 9 “Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure” and SDG 10 “Reduced inequalities”. The most common SDGs were **SDG 13 “Climate Action”** and **SDG 15 “Life on Land”**, followed by **SDG 14 “Life Below Water”** and **SDG 6 “Clean water and Sanitation”**.

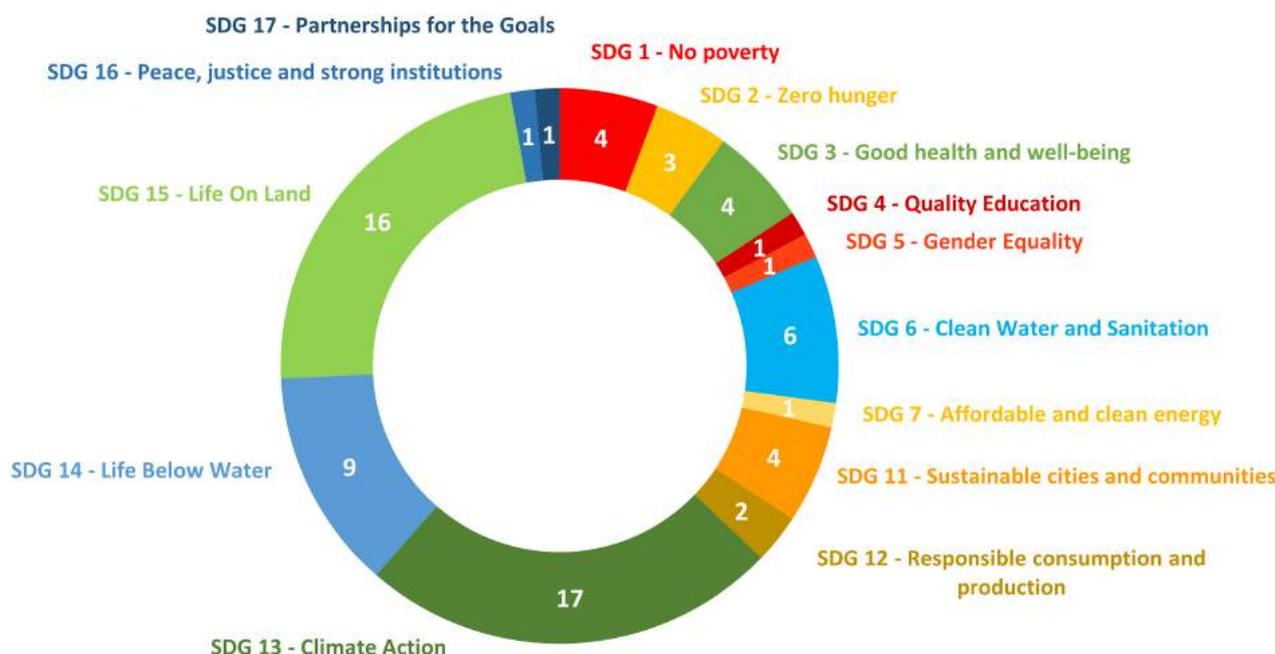


Figure 15. Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals



ASPIRATIONS OF YOUTH

With the future motive of addressing the challenges that youth are facing, we asked what kind of skills and knowledge they would like to develop. The results are shown in a word-cloud in Figure 16.

Techniques on **community engagement** (34%) including how to involve communities in conservation work and to raise awareness and participation in wetland conservation are one of the most reported skills alongside **wetland restoration** (35%) and **monitoring techniques** (32%). **Fundraising skills** (31%), **advocacy** (24%) and **policy** (20%) are also commonly reported by participants.

Almost 20% of participants mention particular research techniques that they wanted to develop including on the topics of **wetland identification and mapping** such as “ecosystem assessment and identification”, “peat characterization”, “wetland identification”, “temporal mapping of wetland dynamics”, “Mapping in Google Earth” and “Wetland delineation”, and **greenhouse gas emissions** measurements such as “GHG flux measurements”, “carbon footprint within mangroves”, “carbon capture by coastal marine systems”, “carbon sequestration and biochar involvement”. A few other specific topics mentioned are “sustainable livelihood strategies”, “economic evaluation of mangroves and funding mechanisms”. Two participants also mention an interest in developing some soft skills including **leadership** and **conflict management**.



Figure 16: Aspiration of youth working in wetlands

RELEVANCE OF YOUTH NETWORK

As a global wetland network for youth that are involved in wetlands, we were interested in knowing if there was an interest in youth to be part of a network. 94% of the respondents show interest in being part of a global network emphasizing the relevance of YEW as a platform to connect like-minded young people around the topic of wetland conservation and wise use.



REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS

Overview of Respondents (Region, Age, and Sex)

The YEW team was very pleased with the outcome of the survey and this exploratory research, the first of its kind led by our core team. We count the 88 responses from around the world as a great start which we wish to keep growing on in the future. Nevertheless, the team was surprised to see such low responses from Europe, Oceania and North America. This low response rate is quite contradictory to a previous citizen science wetland survey, where academics from North America and Europe made up a relatively larger number of responses (McInnes et al., 2020). Currently YEW's core team does not have Regional Representatives in Europe or Oceania which, we believe, might drive this lack of representation. Alternatively, we recognize that the form of youth engagement and needs may be different in Europe, North America and Oceania.

The apparent imbalance in the number of female respondents is a concern for YEW. This gives preliminary indications that wetland conservation remains a male-dominated sector of work. There is evidence that women are often excluded from decision-making in conservation and natural resource management (James et al., 2021), which supports the imbalance we see. Gender inequality remains today an issue that is deeply ingrained in social-cultural norms around wetland conservation (Aguilar, 2021). In addition, Taft (2010 in Earl et al., 2017) in their study on youth activism suggests that girls face different challenges as their male counterparts as they decide to take on the identity of "activist" as it is perceived as a devaluation of their identity as girls. Gender remains today one of the many factors that will affect youth participation in activism (Checkoway, 2011).

YEW believes that greater efforts need to go towards empowering women and non-binary people. As a start, providing more examples, role models, opportunities and enabling conditions of wetland conservation work led by females and diversity in gender representation is crucial.

Given these initial results, YEW sees the benefit in exploring this question further in order to gain better understanding of the reasons behind this distribution. We also recognize the need to explore gender representation in our future surveys in recognition that "sex" does not reflect an individual's gender. Among other factors that may influence youth participation which have not been explored through this survey are race, Indigenous identity, income, education, residence (urban/rural), religious tradition, cultural beliefs, civic knowledge, legal constraints, institutional barriers, adult attitudes among many others (Checkoway, 2011) that are worth exploring.



NATURE OF WORK (Wetland type and type of activity)

The majority of our respondents work for NGOs and/or Research Institutes, revealing little representation of youth in government organizations and community based programs. We are uncertain at this point of the reason behind the lack of representation in both government and community based organizations. One of the reasons for this might be how the survey was disseminated, for example: it might not have been accessible to young people working in community based organizations with poor internet access.

Potentially, youth working in community based organizations or governments might not feel included or have little incentive to complete the survey. A similar citizen science based survey in wetlands carried out in 2017 (McInnes et al., 2020) also had a larger number of NGO and academics (~53%) as compared to national/regional government (14%) and citizen groups (2.96%). This gives us an opportunity to use different platforms or communication strategies in the future to reach a wider audience and to make the respondents feel included in the surveys.

However if this discrepancy was because of absence of youth in government organizations then the importance of creating opportunities for youth to enter government led initiatives through intergenerational mentoring opportunities or

participation of youth in official delegations appears vital. Further investigation needs to be done to understand this dynamic.

Half of the respondents shared that the amount of work dedicated to wetlands is above 50% of their workload, which shows a significant time commitment to wetland activities. These wetland activities are dominated by “Research”, “Education and Awareness”, and “Monitoring”, and a large majority of respondents report doing more than one type of activity. The wide array of actions reported by participants highlights the diverse and sometimes overlapping roles that a young person undertakes within one project.

It is important to mention that the most prevalent wetland activities are tightly related with the main focus of youth on the “Biodiversity and Conservation” and “Wetland Ecosystem Services” aspects of wetland conservation and wise use.



PERCEPTION TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

When sharing their perception of the level of youth engagement within their research and conservation activities in their region, the responses from survey participants vary greatly including within a region. We believe this is due to youth efforts differing largely across a nation and their great dependence on the local context. In addition, respondents will have different definitions and expectations of youth engagement. Due to the nature of the question and the 5 options for answers, we should keep in mind some respondents could have answered “medium engagement” as a result of indecision when answering. This question deserves greater exploration in the future with the survey respondents.



BARRIERS TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The challenges faced by youth in the field of wetland conservation are diverse. While some issues are specific to being a young person, many are issues that are commonly found in wetland conservation such as lack of resources, political will and awareness raising and understanding of wetland issues and importance (Prideaux, Rostron and Duff, 2015).

As respondents shared that “volunteer and in-kind support” and “International donor-based funds” are two of the most important economic sources for their work, it is no surprise that funding in wetland conservation is one of the key issues that youth are facing. Donor based funding, especially in nature conservation, is known to be vulnerable to economic downturns (Elliott, Seldon and Regens, 1997), jeopardizing the focus, quantity and quality of research done (Bakker et al., 2010). Lack of funding turns more problematic if we consider that a little over 30% of our respondents report doing volunteer work in several aspects of wetland engagement.

Some of the important work that youth are doing to protect wetlands is coming from unpaid volunteer work, which can be hard to maintain in a sustainable manner.

A respondent reported fearing life threatening situations, which, unfortunately, is the reality for many conservationists and activists around the world and are often related to the socio-political environment of countries. In the year 2016 alone, a total of 200 environmental defenders around the world were murdered for protecting nature (Global Witness, 2017). Even though this is an isolated response, YEW takes this issue with extreme concern, as life threatening situations are deterrents for youth to work in conservation around the world. More importantly, young people should be able to protect nature by exercising their right to live in a healthy environment without fearing for their life.

RELEVANCE OF THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

We found that half of our survey respondents are working on Ramsar Sites, which underscores the relevance of youth work in supporting wetland conservation and wise use in Wetlands of International Importance. Aside from reaching out to our networks and social media, YEW relied on the CEPA focal points across several regions for the socialization of the survey, which may have increased the number of respondents working in Ramsar sites. Nevertheless, this still highlights the importance of youth in supporting various aspects of the Ramsar mission.

Half of the participants were aware of the relevance of the Ramsar Convention to their work regardless of whether they were working within a Ramsar Site or not, which underscores the level of awareness of the Ramsar Convention among young people. For the other half and the four participants that believed the Ramsar Convention was not relevant to their work because their sites were not Ramsar Sites, it would be worthwhile to further disseminate the resources that the convention has put forward to drive effective wetland protection and wise use in ways that are accessible to youth.

At a time when the impact of the Ramsar Convention is put under scrutiny (Bridgewater & Kim, 2021), we report that the Ramsar Sites designations have been influential in advocacy, in receiving funding and in garnering national protection status for some of our respondents.

One of the most prevalent barriers faced by youth in their work was the lack of awareness of the importance of wetlands at local and international level. This reinforces the goal of the 50th anniversary campaign: “to achieve increased understanding about what wetlands “are” and the services they provide (...)”, highlighting the level of urgency. We recognize, however, that much more can be done to increase awareness at local, regional and international level, and the Convention could be leveraging youth’s abilities and knowledge to achieve a broader dissemination and implementation of those goals.

Youth Engaged in Wetlands in the Ramsar Conference of the Parties COP13, Dubai 2018



YOUTH AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SDGs

Almost one third of the youth respondents can see the relevance of their work with respect to the SDGs, which highlights the awareness of youth regarding the topic and the importance of involving youth as essential actors in the development of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. These results also show the intersecting benefits that wetlands provide to different dimensions of sustainable development. Greater communication and outreach on the SDGs and the relevance of wetlands in achieving SDGs could lead to a larger number of wetland youth reporting connections between their work and the SDGs.



Youth Engaged in Wetlands in the Ramsar Conference of the Parties COP13, Dubai 2018

ASPIRATIONS OF YOUTH

Young people have shown their curiosity, ambition and desire to improve their work related to wetlands. This curiosity and ambition are an avenue for collaboration with interested parties who wish to work together with youth and to support their efforts through capacity building, mentoring and practical or hands-on opportunities that can reinforce key skills. Particular topics of interest to participants are:

- Sustainable funding mechanisms and fundraising techniques
- Community engagement
- Wetland restoration
- Monitoring and evaluation techniques
- Advocacy & policy making
- Wetland identification and mapping
- Greenhouse gas emissions measurements
- Soft skills: Leadership, Conflict Management

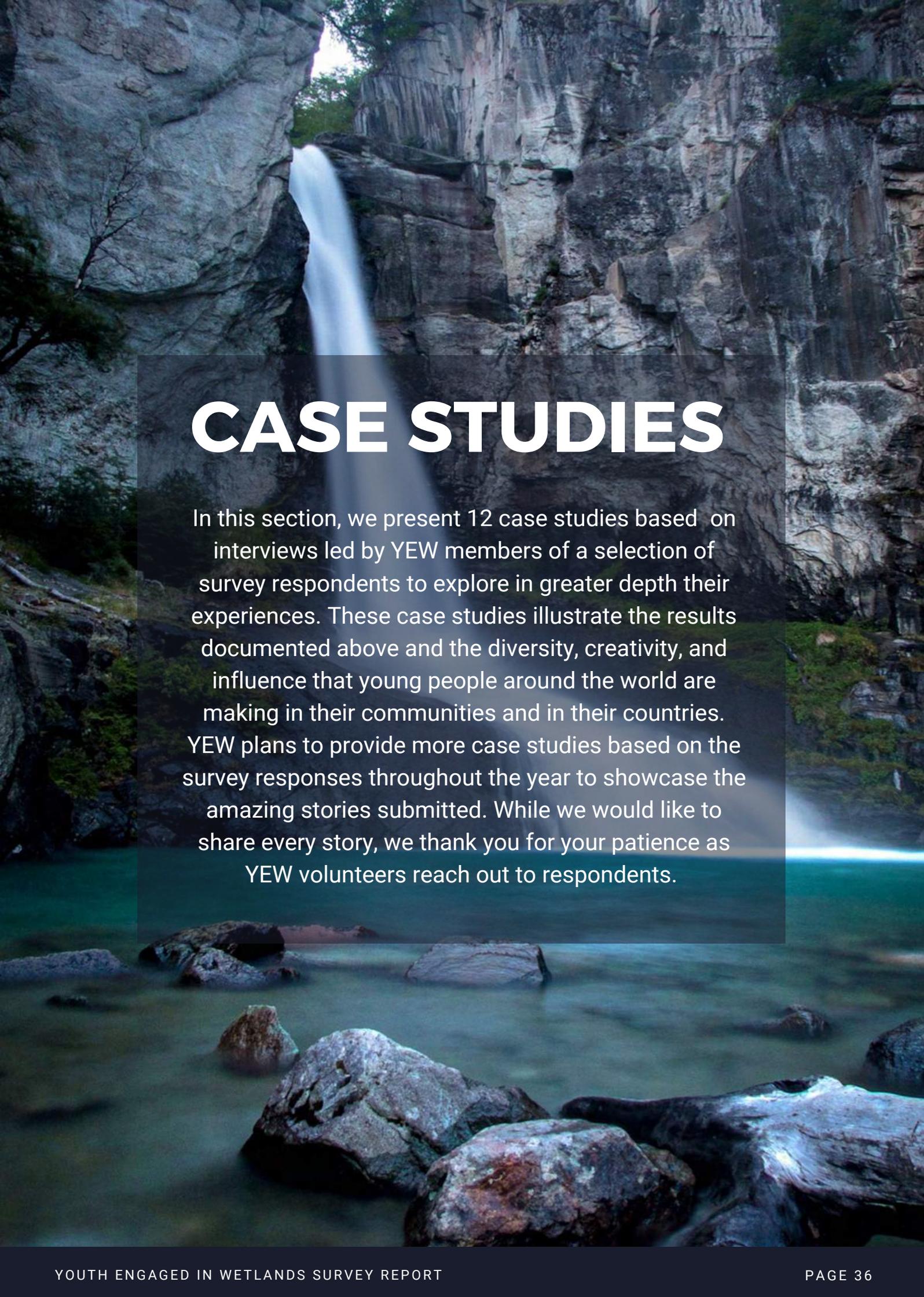
RELEVANCE OF A YOUTH NETWORK

Respondents are highly interested in having a youth network to support their work. The need to find like-minded youth who are willing to share their experiences with others is a testament of the fresh and trailblazing youth leadership in wetland work. This finding is further supported by Checkoway (2011) in his exploration of youth participation that highlights that “it is difficult to involve young people when they do not view themselves as a group that can create change, or when they have ideas but are unsure how to proceed, or when they take action but lack resources for implementation”.

Similarly, Corriero (2004) underlines the importance of engaging young people within an organization to familiarize them with its inner workings so that young people can then be meaningfully involved in problem solving and decision-making processes. In that way, young people and organizations can respond together to “the complex and evolving organizational challenges being faced” (Corriero, 2004 p.11).

The relevance of a youth network which can strengthen connections, understanding and capacities is all the more relevant to ensure that young people can participate meaningfully in wetland conservation and decision-making at different levels.





CASE STUDIES

In this section, we present 12 case studies based on interviews led by YEW members of a selection of survey respondents to explore in greater depth their experiences. These case studies illustrate the results documented above and the diversity, creativity, and influence that young people around the world are making in their communities and in their countries. YEW plans to provide more case studies based on the survey responses throughout the year to showcase the amazing stories submitted. While we would like to share every story, we thank you for your patience as YEW volunteers reach out to respondents.

AFRICA HIGHLIGHTS



CAMEROON
3.8480° N, 11.5021° E

UGANDA
0.1699° N, 30.0781° E

AFRICA HIGHLIGHTS:

African Youth Wetland Network - RAJEZOH (Réseau Africain des Jeunes sur les Zones Humides)

Youth engagement in the project/initiative:

Is led entirely by young people (18-35 years old) and is supported by adult supervisors

Location: Yaoundé, Cameroun

Wetland types: Mangroves, marshes, riverine wetlands, geographically isolated wetlands

Topics: Constructed Wetlands, Wetland Ecosystem Services, Mapping and Modelling, Cultural values of wetlands

Activities: Restoration activities, Monitoring, Wetland Management, Education and awareness, Wetland advocacy, Research, Ecotourism, Cultural activities



**STORY BY ROGER DELAMOU
TRANSLATED BY MARÍA E. SÁNCHEZ**

RAJEZOH is a platform for reflection, exchange, and action for youth (18-35 years) regarding the sustainable management of wetlands. Activities include organizing forums and conferences about the importance of wetlands, increasing the awareness of the communities living around wetlands on the protection and wise-use of these ecosystems, and mobilizing the communities of Yaoundé and surrounding towns for the protection of the Ebogo Wetland.

Awawou MANOUORE NJOYA, age 32, is a PhD student at the University of Yaoundé I. She studies Hydrobiology and Environment and is the Permanent Secretary of the African Youth Wetland Network (RAJEZOH, by its French acronym). RAJEZOH is a Non-Governmental Organization composed by African youth.

The RAJEZOH, is a youth network present in 10 African countries, represented by focal points in each member state, with the objectives of:

- Initiating a call for all African nations to include youth in wetland conservation,
- Being an operational hand for governments in the protection of wetlands,
- Conducting a wetland inventory in each of the member states of the network, including both degraded wetlands and those in good condition,
- Contributing to the restoration of degraded wetlands,
- Mobilizing young African people in wetland protection initiatives,
- Being represented in international organizations related to wetland protection activities.

The Ebogo wetland has great importance on water supply for the Yaoundé population and the surrounding towns, the fish supply for fisherman, ecotourism, hunting, and farming activities. In light of the resulting accelerated wetland degradation due to anthropogenic pressures, Awawou and her peers have committed themselves as volunteers to increase awareness among wetland communities, Cameroonian youth, and the government, and invite them to get involved in the protection of the Ebogo wetland and promoting the wise-use of wetlands in Cameroon.

In Cameroon, the value of wetlands is minimized, their use is uncontrolled, and the government is considered, by most Cameroonians, as the sole responsible for wetland protection. This is why Awawou, has started awareness-raising activities in Yaoundé and its surroundings for the protection of the Ebogo Ramsar Site. Such activities include environmental education, organizing forums and conferences in order to reduce anthropogenic degradation at the Ebogo ecotourism site, and advocating Cameroonian decision-makers to restore the degraded wetlands and to conserve those that remain in good condition.

Their greatest success so far has been the establishment of a youth network in 10 African countries to promote the socio-economic importance of wetlands.

Future plans for Awa and RAJEZOH:

- The restoration of the Nyong river shores, a highly important wetland.
- Awareness-raising with African youth to increase involvement in the protection of wetlands all across Africa.

Major challenges that RAJEZOH has faced

The reality of African rulers abandoning youth didn't escape Awawou and her collaborators, this is why RAJEZOH is facing a lack of resources (tools, materials, and financial). These resources could facilitate the establishment of an action plan in Cameroon and the other 10 member states of the network.

Another challenge for RAJEZOH is the reticence of the Cameroonian government and difficulties in gathering the paperwork that will authorize the network to exercise their activities not only in the headquarter country Cameroon but elsewhere.

Personal Impact

Through the years, Awawou has been at the frontlines interacting between governments and African youth to develop the initiatives and guidelines for the protection of wetlands. She has been able to participate in large workshops and conferences with scientists and young people from around the world, as well as participate in the Ramsar COP13 in Dubai in 2018, where she became a member of Youth Engaged in Wetlands.



A visit to the Ebogo ecotourism site with the REJEPH and SOPNA members



Team briefing before the site visit with the REJEPH and SOPNA members

AFRICA HIGHLIGHTS:

A Youth-led & community-owned organization for wetland conservation and a healthy environment in Uganda

Youth engagement in the project/initiative:
Is led entirely by young people (18-35 years old)

Location: Kasese, Uganda

Wetland types: Swamps, Freshwater Marsh, Riverine Wetland, High altitude wetlands

Topics: Biodiversity Conservation, Wetland Hydrology, Climate Change and Greenhouse gas dynamics, Constructed Wetlands, Wetland Ecosystem Services, Agriculture and wetlands, Mapping and Modelling, Cultural values of wetlands

Activities: Restoration activities, Monitoring, Wetland Management, Education and awareness, Wetland advocacy, Research, Ecotourism, Cultural activities

Designations: Ramsar Site, Important Bird Area, Biosphere Reserve, UNESCO World Heritage Site, National Protected Area, Indigenous Protected Area

STORY BY ELISE ALLÉLY-FERMÉ

Edwin Mumbere (30) is the coordinator of Centre for Citizens Conserving (CECIC), a youth-led and community-owned non-profit organization dedicated to influencing environmental policies to benefit the most vulnerable and to protect and restore wetlands across Uganda.

Edwin grew up near Lake Edward, from a family of fishermen where he developed an appreciation for the lake and surrounding wetlands. Today, due to a combination of climate change and wetland loss, areas surrounding the lake have been subject to severe flooding. Edwin Mumbere lost his own home to flooding. Today, he explains: *"I feel it is my obligation to fight."*

About CECIC

Edwin Mumbere and other co-founders started CECIC in 2006 as secondary school students, gradually expanding their activities until they registered as a non-profit organization in 2010.



CECIC meeting
Credit: CECIC

CECIC is led by a team of six young people (2 men and 4 women). Their Board is composed of community members that help shape the work of the team.

In Uganda, young people represent the largest proportion of the population followed by women. For Edwin and his team, their work is an opportunity to reach out to youth and women. Celebrating already its 15th anniversary, Edwin has a lot of achievements to share. The team works on a diversity of activities, a few of which are highlighted here.

CASE STUDIES: AFRICA HIGHLIGHTS

Governance

The team organizes local parliaments bringing together local leaders and community members to discuss specific issues and to find solutions that will benefit the local community. Edwin and his team are trying to foment greater collaboration with the government.

Community-owned project & plastic pollution

The team aims to build community ownership of each project and to increase the participation of women and empower them to lead their own projects. A women-led project involved 200 women for the elaboration of baskets, mats and door curtains from plastic waste collected from nearby wetlands. The team has also built three houses out of a combination of mud/cement and plastic bottles as well as six water tanks for local schools. In 2007, CECIC received an Award from the district for the best eco-community project for this work.

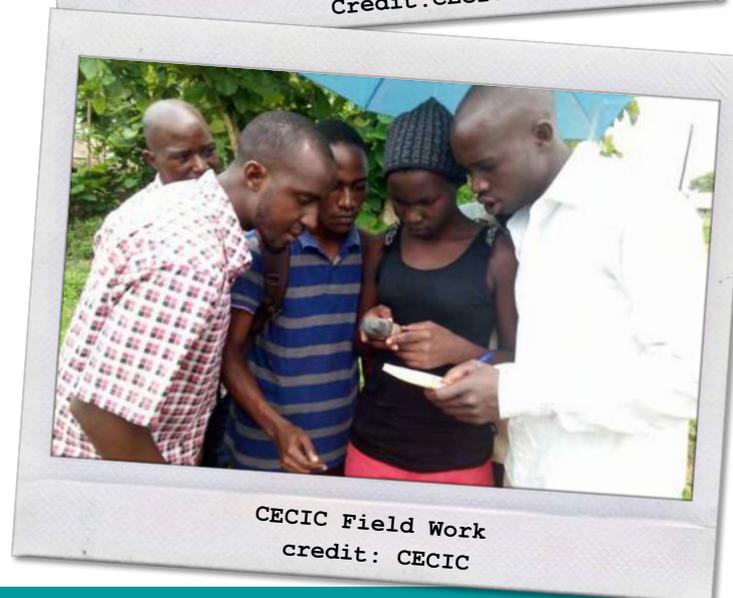
Advocacy and Lobbying

Currently, one of their largest advocacy campaigns relates to the construction of the [East African Crude Oil Pipeline](#), which would affect 27 wetlands including 14 Ramsar Sites in Uganda. CECIC is advocating for the protection of the land and environmental rights of the communities affected by the pipeline by sensitizing communities and government representatives of the importance of wetlands, writing letters and petitions and meeting with government representatives.

Challenges for CECIC

Security is an important matter of concern for Edwin and his team. In December 2020, government security forces and police officers broke into their offices and took their cameras and laptops. It took them four months to come back to normal with the support of various organizations. They received defenders training to increase their security, but it remains an important concern.

Fundraising is also an important challenge for the team. With more financial support, they could cover a wider area and increase their activities. Limited financial support to translate the various materials and resources about the environment and oil & gas activities into a variety of local languages is a priority.



Personal Impact of CECIC

Across the years, Edwin greatly values working with and learning from the communities that they work with. He explains: "I feel at home and I have made so many friends. I feel I am so attached to the project. At the end of the day, it helps me emotionally. Even when we receive threats, we have the support from the community. It keeps us moving every day."

ASIA HIGHLIGHTS



MONGOLIA
46.8625° N, 103.8467° E



INDIA
27.0238° N, 74.2179° E

ASIA HIGHLIGHTS:

PhD project in Sambhar Salt Lake, Rajasthan India

Youth engagement in the project/initiative:

Entirely youth-led

Location: Sambhar Salt Lake, Rajasthan, India

Wetland types: Inland saline lake

Topics: Biodiversity monitoring, ecosystem services, remote-sensing, habitat analysis

Activities: Monitoring, Wetland Management, Education and awareness, Wetland advocacy, Research, Volunteer work

Designations: Ramsar site and Important bird area

STORY BY BIDHYA SHARMA

Rajashree Naik is a third year PhD scholar in the Department of Environmental Science, School of Earth Sciences, Central University of Rajasthan. She decided to work in wetlands after she visited Sambhar Lake, saw the horrifying conditions of degradation and encroachment that the lake was going through and following the suggestion from her PhD Supervisor Dr. Laxmi Kant Sharma, who is an Associate Professor, former Head & Dean, School of Earth Sciences, Department of Environmental Science, Central University of Rajasthan.

Dr. Sharma had already been working on the same study area since 2015 through Geospatial Techniques. As this is a saline lake, it was not feasible for Rajashree to lead the whole characterization of the lake given the level of urgency. Therefore, she and her supervisor, Dr. Sharma, decided to go for an integrative approach of geospatial technology (optical, microwave and hyperspectral remote sensing), bird survey, soil-water quality analysis and interaction with local people.

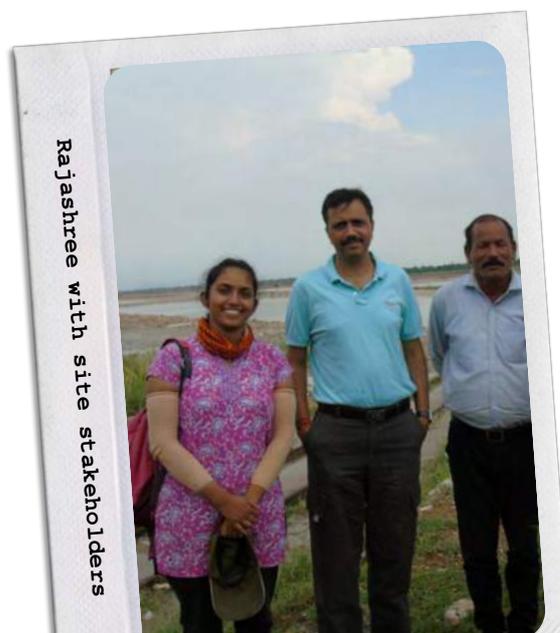
Importance of Sambhar Lake

Sambhar lake is the largest inland saline lake which is one of the gateways to Thar desert and it is important ecologically and economically.

Ecologically, it is the refuge for thousands of biodiverse plants mostly halophytes, xerophytes and halophiles and animals as it is a hot spot for

279 migratory and resident birds like flamingos, which used to flock to the lakes in hundreds of thousands every year. Economically, it has been a historically important salt extraction site contributing 9.86% of total salt production of India to the global salt market. The lake is divided for economic (77 km² towards east as reservoir) and ecological purposes (113 km² as wetland).

Even with this distinction, the economically lucrative illegal saltpan encroachment leads to the degradation of part of the lake that has been dedicated for ecological benefits.



With the onset of this encroachment and degradation, Rajashree has found that 30% of the ecologically preserved lake has now been lost to mining. Stealing brine is worth 300 million USD. This is reflected in the number of Flamingo populations that has declined from hundreds of thousands to only thousands. And she notices a similar decline in the distribution and health of blue-green algae, soil-water quality and other primary productions from the lake.

In her work, Rajashree takes a holistic approach. She combines optical, microwave and hyperspectral remote sensing for geospatial modelling to look at past and present conditions of the lake and with this observation predicts the changes to the lake in the future under different conservation scenarios. She combines this with field observations of monitoring bird populations and assessing habitat conditions. While interacting with locals she found that the local community is in favor of conserving the ecology of wetlands and she works with local communities and NGOs to look into alternate economic measures that can be taken to reduce the pressure from mining encroachment.



Asian waterbird Census team of Sambhar Lake



Collecting water sample during avian botulism of sambhar lake 2019



Rajashree with the experts of sambhar lake discussing about properties of salt found in sambhar lake

Challenging aspects of her work

Challenges for Rajashree to work in these wetlands are like no other. Because of the illegal activities that are going on wetlands- visiting the wetlands and communities for conservation purposes can dangerous for which she must make sure that she is with the local community for safety in her field work. Lack of funding for her project has limited the scope of her work without advanced technology like LiDAR and UAV, limiting the quality and quantity of work that she could have produced. Often, Rajashree is frustrated by lack of concern of stakeholders to the needs of local people and ecology of the lake.

Glimpse of hope...

Seeing the resiliency of Sambhar lake during COVID lockdown was when Rajashree was most hopeful. During a few months when illegal activities were stopped, she could observe in her remotely sensed data that the water level in the lake rose back again and so did the habitat conditions. She is hopeful that the restoration of the lake requires just the right set of legal frameworks to stop illegal activities and without much effort, the lake can regain its ecological function. She is motivated to see the interest of local people in conserving the wetlands and see the future prospect in working towards the restoration of Sambhar lake and in exploring ways for alternate livelihood sources for the local communities.

ASIA HIGHLIGHTS:

Khurkh and Khuiten River Valleys, Mongolia

Type of youth engagement: Is led entirely by young people (18-35 years old), Is supported by adult advisors

Location: Khurkh and Khuiten River Valleys, Khentii province, Mongolia

Wetland types: Peatlands with isolated permafrost

Topics: Biodiversity Conservation, Wetland Hydrology, Climate Change and Greenhouse gas dynamics, Permafrost dynamics, Wetland Ecosystem Services, Agriculture and wetlands

Activities: Monitoring, Wetland Management, Education and awareness, Wetland advocacy, Research, Internship, Volunteer work

Designations: Ramsar Site, Important Bird Area, National Protected Area, Nature Reserve, EAAFP network site

STORY BY BIDHYA SHARMA

Vandandorj Sumiya works as a wetland research and conservation project coordinator at Khurkh and Khuiten River Valleys in North-eastern Mongolia. He is a Leiden Conservation Foundation fellow at the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia. He has been working in this region for the last four years. His project is led by young people and supported by adult advisors.

The valleys are the summer breeding grounds for White-Naped Crane, a vulnerable species according to the IUCN Red List, and support 70 pairs of them, which is the most densely breeding site for the species. The valleys are a part of a Ramsar site, composed of a mosaic of rivers, lakes, permafrost, and peatlands. Mongolia has lost half of its peatland habitats and the present site faces similar consequences because of the grazing pressure and climate change. Both issues degrade the wetland habitat and the population of the White-Naped Cranes. Vandandorj takes a holistic approach to work in his region. Together with scientific techniques to understand soil hydrology and carbon storage, he works with communities and young people to raise awareness. The conflict between agricultural companies and local herders is a major issue for his work at present.



Sharing information about wetland and biodiversity conservation with local students during Crane Festival

Vandandorj mentions that the fact that the valleys are a Ramsar Site has allowed them to be classified as a national protected area, drawing more interest towards the conservation of these sites. He wishes to learn more about wetland restoration techniques and fundraising skills.

Following his participation in the YEW Survey, Vandandorj gave a beautiful presentation of his work in Mongolia for the 2020 Flyway Youth Forum organized by Youth Engaged in Wetlands and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership as part of Day 1 Youth Speakers. His presentation is accessible through [this link](#).

Vandandorj is also a [#PowerofWetlands](#) Ambassador – read his story [here](#).

EUROPE HIGHLIGHTS



NETHERLANDS
52.1326° N, 5.2913° E

LUXEMBOURG
49.8153° N, 6.1296° E

EUROPE HIGHLIGHTS:

Reimagining the peatland paradigm with Re-Peat Earth – Netherlands/International

Youth engagement in the project/initiative:

Is composed mainly of young people, and is youth-led

Location: Based in the Netherlands but international membership

Wetland types: Peatlands

Topics: Biodiversity Conservation, Wetland Hydrology, Climate Change and Greenhouse gas dynamics, Wetland Ecosystem Services, Agriculture and wetlands, Cultural values of wetlands, Interdisciplinarity, Creative activism, Climate Justice.

Activities: Education and awareness, Wetland advocacy, Research, Cultural activities, Collaboration and networking, Re-imagining peatlands.

Designations: None



STORY BY ELISE ALLÉLY-FERMÉ

Frankie Turk (25) is part of an international youth-led collective called RE-PEAT which has members in the Netherlands, Italy, UK, Ireland, Germany and Estonia. Their objective is to change the perception around peatlands so that they are widely valued and to encourage cultural and social connectivity by collectively learning from peatlands.

This creative youth collective works on a range of activities from awareness raising to wetland advocacy. In May 2020, RE-PEAT organized a 24-hour online Peatland Festival gathering people from around the world for a series of nearly 50 sessions all around peatlands from getting to know peatlands from different parts of the world, to film screenings, musical performances, scientific presentations and project highlights, yoga and quizzes.

In November 2020, RE-PEAT also created The Peat Anthology, EU Edition, which is a collection of stories, letters, anecdotes, poems, art, and images from across Europe that has been sent to the Members of the European Parliament before the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The purpose of the Peat Anthology was to complement a policy paper produced by the Griefswald Mire Centre, Wetlands International and the National University of Ireland and call on policymakers through creative means to re- imagine peatlands and to make brave decisions for our future, ensuring that the CAP decision does not harm peatlands.

Some of the challenges that they are looking to overcome are the lack of political and policy level interest as well as difficulty in securing funding.

Frankie gave a presentation of RE-PEAT for the 2020 Flyway Youth Forum organized by Youth Engaged in Wetlands and the East Asian- Australasian Flyway Partnership as part of Day 1 Youth Speakers. Her presentation is accessible through [this link](#).

Frankie is also a [#PowerofWetlands](#) Ambassador!

EUROPE HIGHLIGHTS:

Bird ringing and practical conservation opportunities in Schlammwiss Bird Ringing Station – Luxembourg

Youth engagement in the project/initiative: It is led by both adults (over 35) and young people and includes people from completely different age classes and nationalities

Location: Uebersyren, Luxembourg

Wetland types: Freshwater Marsh, Riverine Wetland

Topics: Biodiversity Conservation
Activities: Monitoring, Education and awareness, Wetland advocacy, Research, Ecotourism, Internship, Volunteer work

Designations: Ramsar Site, Important Bird Area, National Protected Area



STORY BY ELISE ALLÉLY-FERMÉ

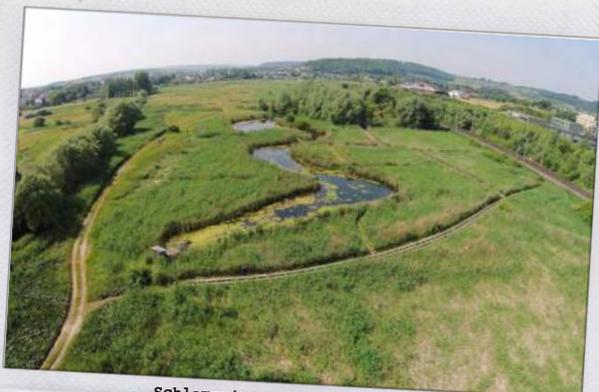
Max Steinmetz (27) started working in the Schlammwiss Bird Ringing Station 10 years ago, as a volunteer working on bird identification and protection. Later on, as part of his university internship, he developed a pilot project at the station monitoring a breeding bird community through acoustic territory mapping. Today, on top of his full-time job restoring and protecting key habitats with the Biological Station "SICONA", he dedicates his free time to support the running of the Schlammwiss station helping with bird ringing activities, environmental education and communication, research on bird ecology and administrative matters. Needless to say, bird conservation and the Schlammwiss bird ringing station have become a big part of his life.



When not in fieldwork

About Schlammwiss

Bird ringing activities by volunteers in Schlammwiss began in a small reed stand along the river Syre in 1969. Since then, due to the interest in bird protection and land purchase by the foundation "Hëllef fir d'Natur" the wetland complex Schlammwiss grew to be one of the biggest wetlands in Luxembourg. In parallel to the global trend of wetland degradation, the Schlammwiss wetland represents a success story as it is the result of years of bird ringing led by a network of friends and adamant birders, purchasing areas for protection, government-funded restoration work as well as cooperation with farmers to restore the wetland and protect a large surface of reeds.



Schlammwiss wetland

Credit: natur&mwelt Fondation Hëllef fir d'Natur

CASE STUDIES: EUROPE HIGHLIGHTS

The bird ringing station, located beneath the Centrale Ornithologique du Luxembourg (the Ornithological Centre for Luxembourg) and the nature conservation organization natur&ëmwelt a.s.b.l. attracted a number of students and volunteers across the years involved in bird conservation. The station's work focuses on environmental education of the broad public and scientific projects of wetland and reed-specific bird species. Working onsite are around 40 volunteers with a core team of around 15 people dedicated to running the station and training other volunteers.

A conservation hub for meaningful conservation opportunities for young people

The station has become a hub for nature and bird lovers in Luxembourg and beyond as well as for conservation exchanges. Students (high school or university) that come to work in the station through the main season from March to October get practical conservation work and are compensated financially for their time.

The station attracts an international and gender-balanced crowd with students coming from across Europe to work in the station on bird ringing or leading guided tours.

Challenges as youth

As a young person, Max also reflected on the challenges that young people face in the sector. Beyond Schlammwiss station, there are a lot of people studying the theory behind conservation but there are limited meaningful opportunities to get hands-on practice like those provided at Schlammwiss.

Another challenge that generally exists is the difficulty for youth voices to be heard. Max says that he feels very fortunate working in the station given the close and collaborative relationship that has developed between senior and young people in the team. The young people on the team feel supported by the more senior team members. Thanks to this intergenerational dynamic, young people feel heard and appreciated.

Finally, Max explained that it is increasingly difficult to find people who are willing and/or able to commit themselves to take care of the administrative and organizational aspects of a project. Max is fascinated by the volunteer dedication to the Station and amazed by the volume of work and the outputs that the Station produces from writing scientific publications and articles, fundraising, data collection and handling. He reminds us to *"never underestimate the efficiency and importance of voluntary work"*.

Schlammwiss' future

Reflecting on the long-term future of the station, Max is convinced that the work of the Station must continue once the seniors on the team won't be there anymore to lead the work. It will require a greater commitment from the younger team members, himself included. He knows that the strong connections that the station has built through its network of volunteers over the years will help the Station to continue to make a positive impact in the future.



Environmental education led by volunteers
Credit: OK Photography



Max teaching about migratory birds
Credit: Schlammwiss Bird Ringing Station



Team picture
Credit: Schlammwiss Bird Ringing Station



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
18.2787° N, 70.3336° W

PARAGUAY
26.8634° S, 58.2919° W

**LATIN AMERICA & THE
 CARRIBEAN HIGHLIGHTS**

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN HIGHLIGHTS:

Educating young people with creativity, connectivity, and curiosity: Fundación Para La Tierra.

Youth engagement in the project/initiative: Led by youth (18-35)

Location: Pilar, Departamento de Ñeembucú, Paraguay

Wetland types: Marshes, Tropical Peatlands, Riverine Wetlands, Humid Chaco

Topics: Education and Awareness Raising, Wetland Conservation

Activities: Education and awareness, conservation, research, and monitoring.

Designations: None



STORY BY MARÍA ELISA SÁNCHEZ

Jorge Damián Ayala Santacruz is the Environmental Education Coordinator for Fundación Para La Tierra. This organization has worked since 2010 for the conservation of fragile habitats through scientific research, community engagement, and environmental education. At their current location in the South of Paraguay, Fundación Para La Tierra is involved in multiple projects to empower communities in Pilar to improve children's environmental education as well as highlighting the importance of wetland conservation through workshops, curriculum building, art displays, and nature walks.

The wetlands from the Ñeembucú area are biologically diverse and represent an important migratory pathway for both fish and birds. These wetlands do not have any local or international designation as a protected area. They are threatened by land-use change (cattle and rice farms) and loss of habitat connectivity due to road building with no environmental considerations.

In light of this, Fundación Para La Tierra is working hard to raise awareness on the importance of these ecosystems by doing scientific research, developing the first studies of endemic species, and educating younger generations on the importance of the conservation of this ecosystem.



Show & tell lecture with the students
credits: Jorge Ayala Santacruz

CASE STUDIES: LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN HIGHLIGHTS

Fundación Para La Tierra has created “Voces de la Naturaleza”, a space for children to learn from nature through three pillars: Creativity, Connectivity and Curiosity. The curriculum, which includes more than 200 lessons, was built to connect children with nature while making observations and learning problem-solving skills through experiments and lessons. This curriculum is available for any teachers or young people (18 and older) who want to lead activities with the children in their community, and training on how to deliver the curriculum is available through Jorge and the team from Fundación Para La Tierra.

Jorge was particularly proud that the organization was awarded funding from the Lush Charity Pot. This allowed an expansion of the community engagement program in Pilar including an art and awareness-raising event for World Fish Migration Day 2020 where kids would paint fish and learn about their importance in the river ecosystem as well as the importance of maintaining healthy rivers and wetlands for the fish’s subsistence. The kids were then interviewed by the local media, raising awareness in the community.

Another part of this project is *Pintando Pilar*, where local artists’ work is showcased through murals of local wildlife throughout the city, beautifying the city and educating citizens about wetland biodiversity.

In their efforts to increase the community’s engagement with nature and the rich biodiversity of the wetlands in the area, Fundación Para La Tierra teamed up with other young people (*Pilar Sustentable*) to create a nature trail through a wetland area in Pilar. This has allowed the community to see the biodiversity of the ecosystems and organize birding events. The organization is looking for funding to acquire land for protecting and conserving it, which will halt the further degradation of these ecosystems.

Jorge believes that where there is will there is power; he mentions that the love for the land is important in his work. Despite governments being reluctant to support environmental education and conservation of wetlands, youth should lead projects towards wetland protection, as this is our responsibility towards future generations.

To learn more about the work that Jorge does with Fundación Para La Tierra, visit their [website](#).



LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN HIGHLIGHTS:

Species conservation, education and community engagement within Monumento Natural Las Dunas de Las Calderas, Dominican Republic

Youth Engagement in the project/initiative: Is led by young people (18-35) and is supported by local professional research advisors

Location: Las Dunas de Las Calderas, Las Calderas, Peravia Province, Rep. Dom.

Wetland types: Salt marshes, mangroves and freshwater wetlands

Topics: Monitoring, Education and Awareness Raising, Research, Ecotourism, Wetland management, Wetland Advocacy

Activities: Biodiversity conservation, mapping and modelling, cultural values of wetlands, ecosystem services

Designations: Important Bird Area, National Protected Area and IUCN Protected Area Category III "Natural Monument"

HISPANIOLANA

STORY BY ELISE ALLÉLY-FERMÉ

Hispaniolana is a youth-led association made up of 13 young people all volunteering their time and skills to conserve the precious ecosystem and species of the "Monumento Natural Las Dunas de Las Calderas", in the Dominican Republic. More than team members, they have been friends since their time at university.

In 2019, they started a project called "Conservation of Threatened Species in the Las Calderas Dunes Natural Monument" funded by the BirdLife Young Conservation Leaders award and mentored by Grupo Jaragua.

About The Calderas Dunes Natural Monument

While the name of this Natural Monument may lead us to believe otherwise, this area is in fact "*much more than just sand*". Within its 1794 hectares and surrounding coastal area, the site hosts a great diversity of wetlands from coastal lagoons, mangroves, small estuaries, springs, some man-made salt ponds, seagrasses and coral reefs. For these friends, this area represents one of the most diverse sites of the Dominican Republic, located only 1 hour away from Santo Domingo, the capital.

There is only one Biology university degree in the Dominican Republic and most Biology students will at some point get a chance to explore the Dunes as a natural laboratory. For this team, it is this special sentimental connection to their time as students combined with the extraordinary diversity within this small yet rich area that gave them the idea of developing a project to protect its endangered and endemic species.



From species identification to environmental education, community relationships and ecotourism This group of friends with their diverse backgrounds in different areas of biology are tackling conservation through research, conservation, education and ecotourism.

Research

The project works on the conservation of threatened and endemic species including the Hispaniolan parrot *Amazona Ventralis*, the rhinoceros iguana *Cyclura cornuta*, among other threatened although widespread species like the green turtle *Chelonia mydas*. Gathering data on these iconic species, seabird colonies, coral reef and seagrasses, the team developed the first-ever baseline for the area.

Community engagement and education

In addition to wider community engagement, the team has led three different environmental education workshops at local schools for children and their parents, so that the community can build a stronger connection with the protected area.

Ecotourism

Their initial plan to train local community members to become nature interpreters was unfortunately cut short because of the COVID pandemic. Nevertheless, they were still able to develop a detailed map of the area representing the different ecosystems as well as key areas for ecotourism activities and hiking trails, as well as produce a species identification guide brochure and a video promoting the ecotourism activities that can be carried out within different areas of the monument.

Challenges

In addition to the COVID pandemic, another challenge they faced was related to the illegal urban expansion occurring within the Protected Area, threatening the area’s ecosystems and species. As the team started to publicly oppose the urban encroachment that is occurring in the area, they received more resistance while reaching out to some local authorities.

As youth, at the beginning of the project, they encountered a lot of doubt from some people, including from some professors who saw their project as too risky and too complicated. But that doubt soon vanished as the team’s efforts and success became apparent.

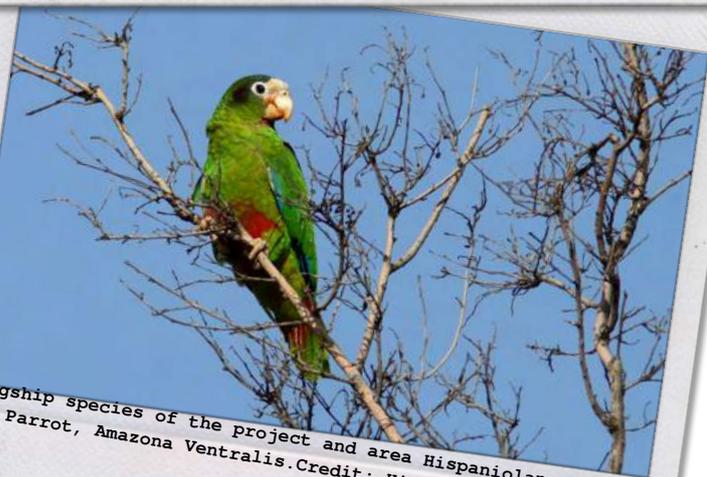
Personal impact and next steps

For the team, this project gave them the opportunity to rediscover the Dunes and see the area with a different eye. As the project will come to an end this year, the team hopes to be able to keep monitoring the area, building links with the community and to develop other projects on mangrove conservation.

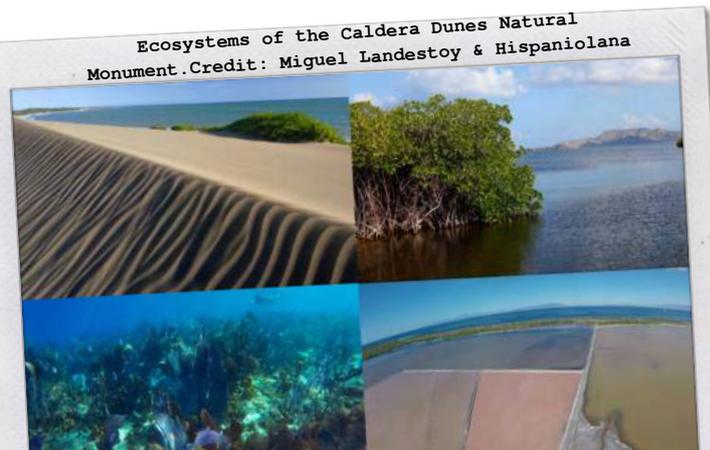
Follow them on [Instagram](#) and through their [Facebook page!](#)



Map of the Caldera Dunes Natural Monument
Credit: Esquea



Flagship species of the project and area Hispaniolana Parrot, *Amazona Ventralis*. Credit: Hispaniolana



Ecosystems of the Caldera Dunes Natural Monument. Credit: Miguel Landestoy & Hispaniolana

NORTH AMERICA HIGHLIGHTS

LOUISIANA
30.9843° N, 91.9623° W

MEXICO
17.8409° N, 92.6189° W

NORTH AMERICA HIGHLIGHTS:

South Louisiana Wetlands Discovery Center: Building community and wetland resilience in the classroom

Youth engagement in the project/initiative: Led by adults (over 35) and includes young people

Wetland types: Estuaries, swamps, freshwater and saltwater marshes.

Topics: Education and Awareness Raising, Cultural Activities, Wetland Protection

Activities: Education and awareness, Resilience Planning

Designations: None



STORY BY MARÍA ELISA SÁNCHEZ

Samantha Hicks and Sarah Fontana, two young marine biologists with Master's Degrees in Marine and Environmental Biology, work for the South Louisiana Wetland Discovery Center (SLWDC). SLWDC offers multiple programs to educate the public, particularly children, on the importance of wetland conservation as well as increase awareness of the challenges and potential solutions that Terrebonne Parish is facing as a coastal community in a world with a changing climate.

South Louisiana is a coastal wetland region built by sediment brought down by the Mississippi River. However, the building of levees along the river has contributed to sediment declination in these coastal areas, which results in land subsidence. This, added to sea level rise due to climate change, results in a massive loss of wetland area each day.

The Gulf of Mexico is a hurricane-prone area, and hurricane events are expected to increase in number and intensity in the future. Without coastal wetland hurricane protection, the communities in South Louisiana are at a greater flood risk than ever before. Sadly, students in this area are on the front line of these coastal issues, because not only are their recreational and fishing areas lost, but also their houses and community infrastructure are constantly at risk.

Coastal Classroom, one of the programs SLWDC created to address these concerns, is aimed at elementary school students. Samantha and Sarah bring in the knowledge they have acquired as scientists to the classroom when planning and teaching the lessons. They visit schools, bringing materials needed for teaching, and through hands-on lessons teach the importance of coastal wetlands to the ecology and resilience of South Louisiana. These lessons are integrated with the state's science standards, thus helping teachers advance with the curriculum.



Coastal Classroom session

A new partnership with the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) has allowed SLWDC to develop the Project Resilience and Hurricane Resilience programs, of which Samantha is particularly proud. In Project Resilience, high schoolers are encouraged to review different plans that have been implemented by other organizations in order to propose their own plan to increase their school's resilience in face of increasing flood risk. In Hurricane Resilience, these students learn about the resilience of hurricane-prone communities in times of climate change.

Each October, SLWDC holds an annual fundraising event called the Rougarou Festival which blends together several cultural aspects of South Louisiana with wetland awareness. People are encouraged to wear costumes, taste traditional food, and learn about coastal wetlands from the many booths available at the event.

As far as challenges go, Sarah mentions environmental science was not in the forefront of education in the past, which led to little funding. However, Louisiana is moving towards teaching better environmental literacy in schools, which will have a great impact in the way decisions are made in the future. As the current pandemic forces education to change, Coastal Classroom lessons are being adapted to online formats in order to continue educating the younger generations.

To learn more about the work Samantha and Sarah do with the South Louisiana Discovery Center please visit their [website](#).

NORTH AMERICA HIGHLIGHTS:

Youth-led project on mangrove restoration in the Pantanos de Centla Biosphere Reserve in Mexico

Youth engagement in the project/initiative:

Entirely led by youth (18-35)

Location: Pantanos de Centla Biosphere Reserve (PCBR), Tabasco, Mexico

Wetland types: Mangroves, Tropical Peatlands, Freshwater marshes, Salt Marshes, Freshwater Wetlands

Topics: Biodiversity Conservation, Wetland Hydrology, Climate Change and Greenhouse gas dynamics, Wetland Biogeochemistry, Wetland Ecosystem Services, Mapping and Modeling.

Activities:

Ecological restoration activities, mangroves monitoring, Wetland Management, Education and awareness raising, Research

Designations: Ramsar Site, UNESCO (MAB) Biosphere Reserve, Important Bird Area, National Protected Area, IUCN Protected Area

STORY BY ELISE ALLÉLY-FERMÉ

Juan Paulo Carbajal Borges, Raúl Alejandro Betancourth Buitrago, Pilar Angélica Gómez-Ruiz and Mariana Arteaga are four inspiring young people that developed a mangrove restoration project using a participatory approach, promoting community networks for the integrated management of the Pantanos de Centla landscape and mangrove recovery within two local communities in Tabasco, in southeastern Mexico. The project was funded with GEF Funds, developed by United Nations Development Program and Mexico's Commission on Nationally Protected Areas (CONANP) through the Resilience Project, and implemented by Foro para el Desarrollo Sustentable, NGO. They were not only collaborators in this project, they have been friends for many years.

Together they developed a conceptual framework to increase community resilience to climate change through the participatory restoration of 50 hectares of mangroves inside PCBRs.

They worked with local communities to increase ownership of the project and to raise awareness on the importance of conserving and restoring mangroves to improve their quality of life.

One of their great successes was also the translation of scientific information related to mangrove restoration, climate change mitigation and adaptation into practical terms for the communities, thanks to the participatory approach that they developed from the very start of the project and by strengthening local governance around ecosystem management.

They were also successful in engaging women and youth in the project, providing greater opportunities for their involvement in decision-making as well as the implementation of restoration actions and their monitoring. Some young people were hired for fieldwork and the monitoring sessions, based on their participation in capacity-building workshops.

CASE STUDIES: NORTH AMERICA HIGHLIGHTS

As young people leading a conservation project, it can be challenging to build projects and manage resources through complex bidding processes and to gain confidence from other partners because of their age. Sometimes, young people do not have enough credibility in spaces traditionally dominated by older generations, especially in more rural areas because knowledge is associated with age. With assertive communication based on respect, horizontal processes and transparency, local people recognized that their team was very capable.

As a young scientist, Pilar faced a different set of challenges linked to being a woman. While she never experienced any disrespect, she could perceive at times some resistance and mistrust because she was the female lead researcher. However, they were able to overcome these challenges by demonstrating technical experience, listening and incorporating local knowledge and making collective decisions in order to build trusting and horizontal relationships. The team also noted more structural challenges in engaging youth and women, in particular due to the land tenure system which is not readily accessible to young people.

A video of the project is available here in [vimeo](#)

Alejandro and Pilar led a capacity building workshop for the **2020 Flyway Youth Forum** organized by Youth Engaged in Wetlands and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership on the topic of *“Local Community Engagement”* based on their experience in the mangrove restoration inside Pantanos de Centla Biosphere Reserve.

Their workshop is accessible through the [this link](#).
The team are also #PowerOfWetlands Ambassadors - read their [story here](#)



Work team of El Palmar community during monitoring workshop. Credits: Robín Canul.

OCEANIA HIGHLIGHTS



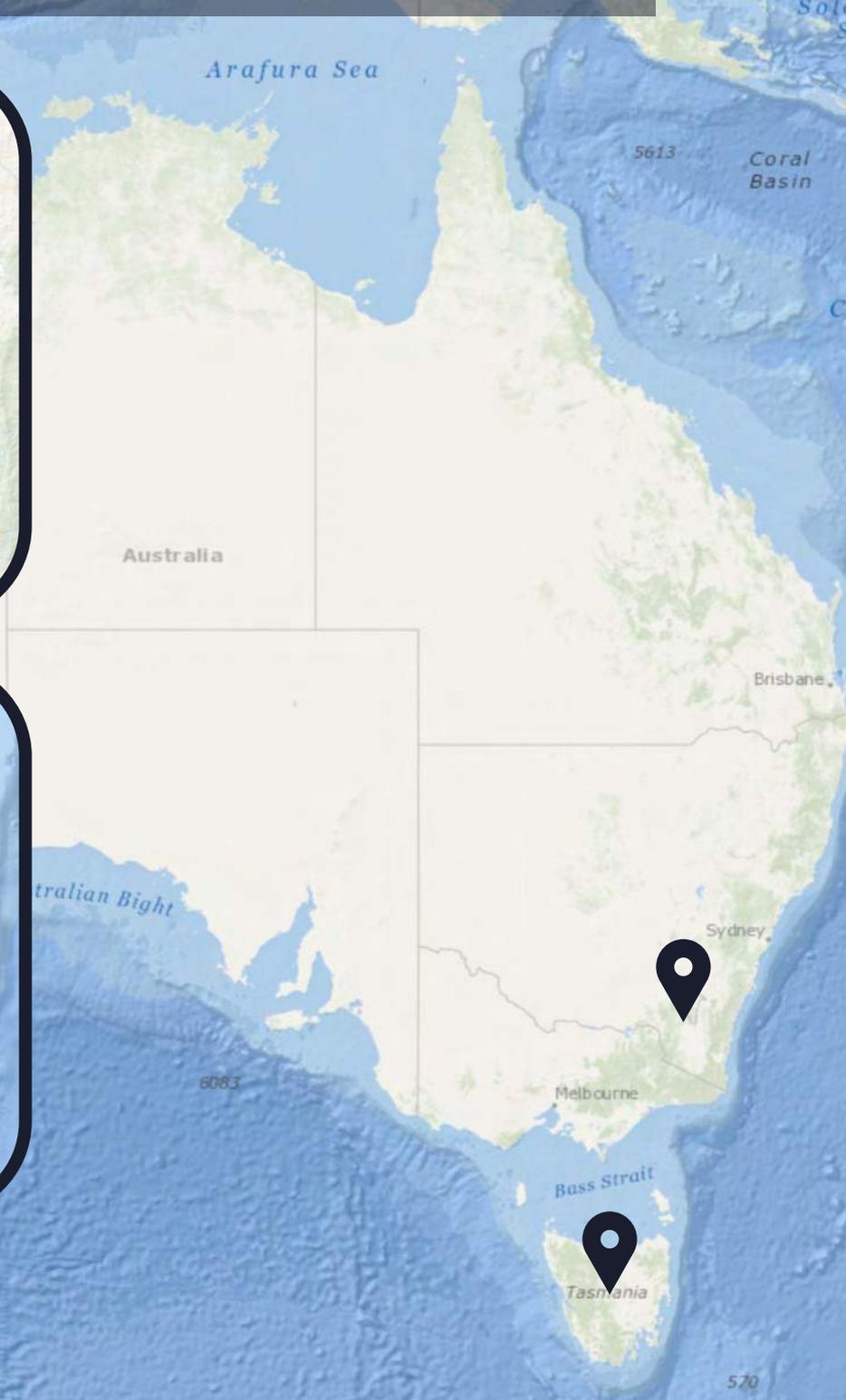
CANBERRA
35.2809° S, 149.1300° E

This inset map shows the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the city of Canberra. The terrain is depicted with green and brown colors, indicating vegetation and elevation. The city of Canberra is clearly marked in the center of the territory.



TASMANIA
42.0409° S, 146.8087° E

This inset map shows the island state of Tasmania. The terrain is shown in shades of green and brown. The island's shape is clearly visible, and the name 'Tasmania' is printed across the center.



OCEANIA HIGHLIGHTS:

Researching wetland-dependent birds of Lagoon of Islands and adjacent wetlands in the Tasmanian Highlands

Youth engagement in the project/initiative:

This research project was organized and conducted by Zoë Ezzy and supported by volunteers (mostly young people) and is supported by adult advisors.

Location: Lagoon of Islands, Central Highlands, Tasmania, Australia

Wetland types: High altitude wetlands, Schwingmoor

Topics: Biodiversity Conservation, Wetland Hydrology

Activities: Research

Designations: None

STORY BY ELISE ALLÉLY-FERMÉ

Zoë Ezzy (25) led her Honor's research project at the University of Tasmania on the Lagoon of Islands in the central highlands of Tasmania (Australia). While studying ecology for her undergraduate degree, she came across a study on Lagoon of Islands – a unique and rare wetland ecosystem of freshwater islands and Schwingmoor bogs.

Intrigued by this wetland, Zoë chose to focus her research on understanding how birds responded to the initial degradation of this system and its current restoration efforts.

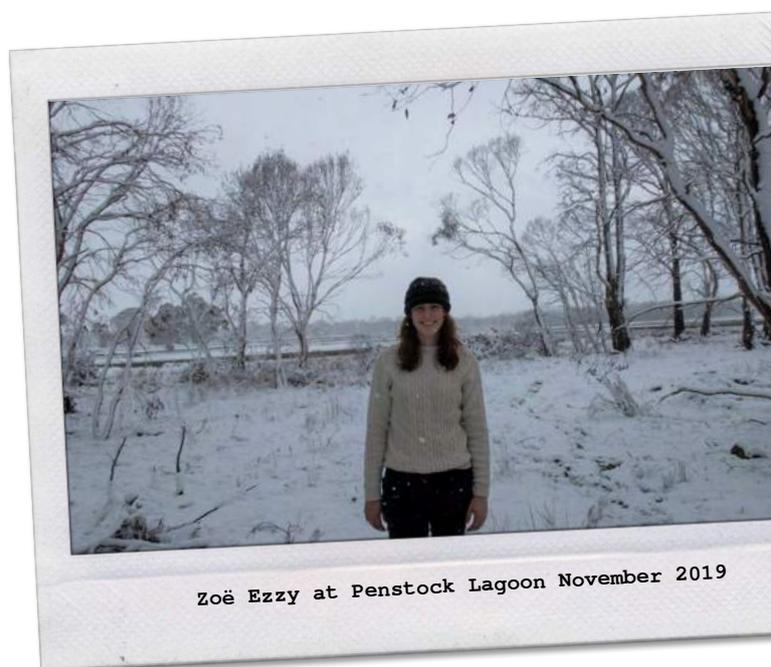
About the Lagoon of Islands

The Lagoon of Islands gets its name from the presence of small islands dotted across the lagoon. It formed in a shallow depression in the local bedrock, which at some point in its past gradually filled with peat, which was then covered with a thin layer of reeds. Something about the structure of the peat and reeds allowed for the formation of temporary islands, emerging out from the lagoon. From Zoë's depiction, this wetland complex sounds quite extraordinary.

1964, Hydro Tasmania created a dam at Lagoon of Islands, and later (in 1985) diverted a river into the system which changed considerably the composition and hydrology of the wetland and led to a set of problems including eutrophication and algal blooms.

"Prior to its damming Lagoon of Islands was unique, but the system was never protected and something of great scientific and ecological value was lost."

In 2013, the dam was removed by Hydro Tasmania and a process of restoration of the Lagoon of Islands system started with the objective of creating a healthy and self-sustaining ecosystem. That's where Zoë comes in, looking to see how birds have responded to the restoration process.



Zoë Ezzy at Penstock Lagoon November 2019

About Zoë's research

Zoë's research project, which she started in 2019, compared the bird populations across three different wetlands (Lagoon of Islands and 2 adjacent wetlands Arthurs Lake and Penstock Lagoon) and across time using the little historical records available around Lagoon of Islands.

Personal discovery and challenges

Zoë found that certain bird monitoring techniques have limited application in wetlands. The amphibious environment of wetlands, from the dry patches to open water bodies, meant that developing adequate monitoring techniques was an interesting challenge.

To conduct her research, Zoë had the help of several volunteers, a diverse group of mostly young people from different backgrounds: a couple came from Sydney that came down to Tasmania just to work on her project with her, a veterinarian that was taking a year off, an American exchange student, a nature trail guide... While Zoë's team of volunteers enjoyed discovering central Tasmania and its birds, she learned a lot from her team's range of backgrounds and skills.

Through her research, Zoë's newly developed bird identification skills made her appreciate the sounds and sights of the wetlands around her - Lagoon of Islands opened her eyes to a whole other world.



Arthur's Lake in March 2020
Credit: Zoë Ezzy

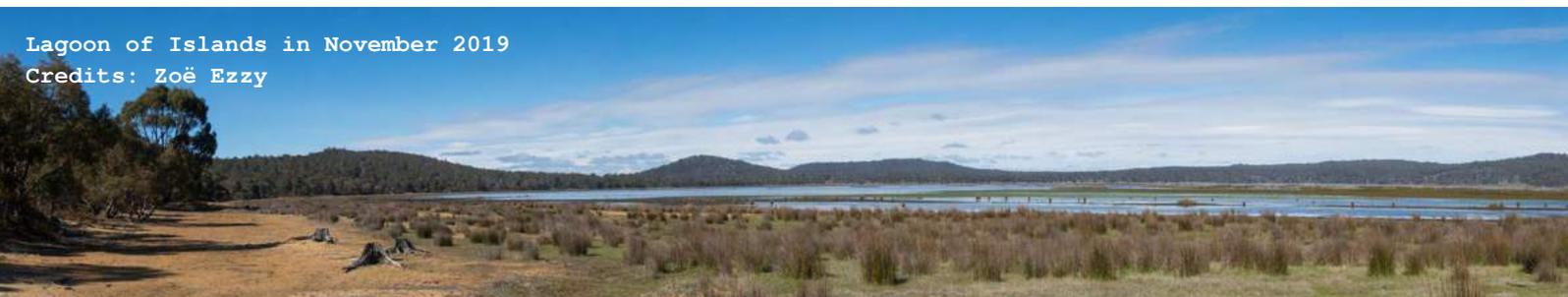
Historical data on Lagoon of Islands before it was dammed is pretty scarce and waterbird population data pre-dam and post-dam come from a limited number of studies. Through her research, Zoë aimed to start to fill this data gap by providing a systematic bird survey for Lagoon of Islands.

She also came to the realization that her study contributes to building greater understanding around wetlands and supports practical restoration work: *"Wetlands are the most degraded ecosystem on the planet. The more information we can get the better. Research projects around wetland conservation have real-world implications"*.



Penstock Lagoon in November after a fresh snowfall - Credit: Zoë Ezzy

Lagoon of Islands in November 2019
Credits: Zoë Ezzy



OCEANIA HIGHLIGHTS:

Jerrabomberra Wetlands outreach project, national protected area

Location: Canberra, Australia

Wetland type: River floodplains

Wetland activities: Biodiversity conservation, education and outreach

Designation: National protected area



STORY BY BIDHYA SHARMA



(Spider Handling) Andy displaying a native Australian Tarantula
Credit: Andy O'Meara

Andrew O'Meara is the education and outreach coordinator at Capital Woodlands and Wetlands Trust and is based in Canberra, Australia. With his undergraduate in environmental science, he first started as a volunteer to work in the wetlands in 2015. He then worked as a tour guide in ecology and wetland ecosystems before he went into his current position.

The Woodland and Wetlands Conservation Trust board manages Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary on behalf of the Australian government. Andrew predominantly works on Jerrabomberra Wetlands.

These wetlands were formed after filling up Lake Burley Griffin in 1964, which led to a high water table on the Molonglo River floodplain, forming Jerrabomberra Wetlands of 174 hectares that presently supports a number of flora and fauna including 250 different bird species. The wetlands are shallow in nature and sometimes dry out during the dry season. Jerrabomberra Wetlands are migratory bird stopover sites, making them quite attractive as bird watching sites and for tracking ecologically important bird species like the Latham snipe. Tracking of the Latham snipe is one of Andrew's roles, bringing an amazing dataset to understand the bird's ecology and movement patterns.

Role of youth in Jerrabomberra Wetlands initiatives

Andrew's team members are predominantly youth and the team is led by an adult supervisor. All the casual staff is under the age of 24! As an outreach coordinator, Andrew works with kids and youth up to university levels and engages them in various wetland ecology activities from birdwatching, through hiking, to clay sculpting. The business model of Jerrabomberra Wetlands is focused around youth empowerment. During storytimes, Andrew and his team members read novels and books about wetland stories around Australia to the other kids and youth.

The dynamic youth group working in Jerrabomberra Wetlands managed restrictions due to COVID-19 quite well. Within two months of shut-down, most of the activities moved online and they organized seminars and webinars on wetland topics.

Future plans...

In the coming years, Andrew is super motivated to keep working in wetland outreach and share the knowledge that he has gained with a wider group. His group has plans to build a visitor centre for the wetlands that can offer workshops for up to hundreds of school kids every day.

Personal impacts

On a personal level, Andrew recalls having learned so much not just in ecology but in climate change and education. He has developed a deeper respect for nature and heightened motivation in educating others about ecology, especially in changing climate conditions.

Challenges

Certain challenges that Andrew faces are in regards to interacting with other stakeholders and making them understand the importance of wetlands and the activities that are carried out in Jerrabomberra Wetlands.

Learn more about Jerrabomberra wetlands and the ongoing work of Andrew and his team members here on the [website](#).



CONCLUSION

Youth engagement in wetland conservation and wise use has many facets. Each project is unique and the diversity of youth initiatives that has been shown through the responses we have received highlight the different forms that youth engagement can take. **Around the globe, efforts led by youth are instrumental in addressing wetland issues and for initiating or amplifying conservation actions.** These efforts range across different wetland ecosystems and take different forms from awareness-raising to research and advocacy.

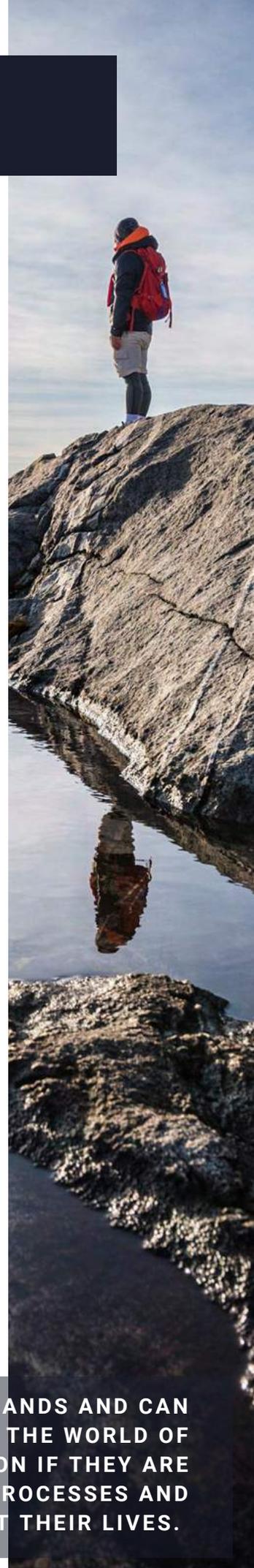
Youth is more than an age category, it is as a period of life. Youth is greatly heterogeneous by definition and provides each one of us with different sets of challenges depending on local contexts. **Yet, through our diversity, we are also united by some common obstacles that are specific to our age group as well as a common sense of urgency and vision of a world where together wetlands and people thrive.** Our respondents are motivated, already taking great action for wetlands, and are keen on finding solutions to the barriers that they often face. In tackling these challenges, **youth aspire to increase their capacity and impact as educators, researchers, advocates, and conservationists.** This report confirms that youth are indeed creators of change, motivated to make a difference at whichever level they choose for wetlands in their community or around the world - young people are *"taking action for the conservation and wise use of wetlands"*. Acting alone or in a group, they use their creativity, resourcefulness, skills, and energy to work towards healthy wetlands for nature and people.

In the context of the **50th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention**, we recognize how instrumental the Convention has been for the protection of wetlands around the world. The **Ramsar Convention and Ramsar sites clearly hold significance in these youth-driven projects.** For some, the Convention provides a framework for wetland conservation and wise use. And for others, Ramsar Sites are important to gain the support/interest of various stakeholders. In addition, efforts led by youth in wetland conservation have over-arching benefits, in addressing and achieving different Sustainable Development Goals.

However, the enduring and dire loss and degradation of wetlands remind us that we are far away from reaching the desired goals of the Ramsar Convention, the Sustainable Development Goals, Aichi Targets, and the Paris Agreement among other global agendas. This state of emergency calls for greater ambition as well as increased collaboration and the development of new and unconventional partnerships. **Youth are key allies for wetlands and can contribute constructively to the world of wetland conservation if they are meaningfully involved in processes and decisions that ultimately affect their lives.**

Finally, the stories shared by youth in this report inspire us greatly and are a wonderful reminder that one of the youth's best assets is the capacity to innovate and provide unconventional solutions to the world's pressing issues. These assets and abilities should be fostered and the enabling conditions for meaningful youth engagement should be secured. In this way, youth initiatives and partnerships with young people can grow and contribute to the positive change that is so desperately needed for the world's wetlands.

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NEXT STEPS FOR YEW

The youth participants raised an overwhelming interest in being part of a global youth network for wetlands. **We see YEW as a key network that can provide this collaborative space for youth to connect, share, learn and amplify their impact.**

This survey has been critical for YEW, first, to connect with and learn more about youth-led initiatives all around the world and to build the basis for a strong youth network; second, to use the findings to define our future activities in a way that they can respond to the needs and aspirations of youth and third, to develop the Second Edition of YEW Wetlands Youth Survey to explore the questions that remain unresolved in time for the Ramsar COP15.

So what do we do now?

- **Discuss** - Our objective with this report is that it remains a living document. We want to explore the findings with you, understand the trends that are shown, discuss and criticize what we have found. ***What do you think?*** That is what we want to know. With that in mind, we plan to explore these findings with youth around the world and interested stakeholders through a series of thematic webinars and workshops.
- **Exchange** - YEW will be developing further resources and platforms, to gather a diversity of youth voices as well as to foster and build a common voice for wetland youth agendas. Through our upcoming YEW membership, we hope that YEW becomes a network that is molded by youth voices from around the world.
- **Collaborate** - Based on the findings of the report and the future discussions, we are keen to collaborate with national/regional and international agencies, youth groups, NGOs and governments that are interested in enhancing youth capacities in wetlands agendas. We also need more spaces that are accessible to young people to allow their voices to be heard especially where decisions affect their lives. YEW is committed to creating more of these spaces and supporting the development of formal mechanisms for the participation of youth in key decision-making bodies including the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, allowing for greater intergenerational dialogue and collaboration for wetlands.

We believe that building and supporting young wetland leaders and defenders in their actions for wetlands should be a consistent effort by a number of stakeholders at local, regional, and international levels. To ensure the survival of healthy wetlands globally for generations to come, we have to join forces. We, at YEW we are committed to doing so through its platform and through collaborative actions with other stakeholders.

You can follow YEW's future work through our [website](#) and on [Facebook](#). If you are interested in joining YEW's future membership, register your interest through our [website](#). For any future collaborations, please contact us through youthengagedinwetlands@gmail.com

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