

World Wetlands Day (February 02)

With 75 Ramsar sites India has the largest network in South Asia

Amrit Dharohar scheme announced in Union Budget 2023-24 to encourage optimal use of wetlands and enhance biodiversity

(Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change)

February 01, 2023

“Wetlands are very important for the existence of our earth, because many birds and animals depend on them. Along with enriching Biodiversity, they also ensure flood control and groundwater recharge.”

- [Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#)

Importance of Wetlands – Global Context

Wetlands are vital ecosystems which sustain biological diversity. Wetlands are the Earth’s most threatened ecosystems and disappearing three times faster than forests¹. Nearly 90 per cent of the world’s wetlands have been degraded since the 1700s. Since 1970, that is in 50 years — 35 per cent of the world’s wetlands have been lost. Human activities that lead to loss of wetlands include drainage and infilling for agriculture and construction, pollution, overfishing and overexploitation of resources, invasive species and climate change.

This vicious cycle of wetland loss, threatened livelihoods, and deepening poverty is the result of mistakenly seeing wetlands as wastelands rather than lifegiving sources of jobs, incomes, and essential ecosystem services. A key challenge is to change mindsets to encourage governments and communities to value and prioritize wetlands.



¹ <https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/about>

Wetlands are critically important ecosystems that contribute to biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation, freshwater availability, world economies and more. It is urgent that we raise national and global awareness about wetlands in order to reverse their rapid loss and encourage actions to conserve and restore them. World Wetlands Day is the ideal time to increase people’s understanding of these critically important ecosystems.

Background

World Wetlands Day is celebrated each year on 2nd February to raise awareness about wetlands. This day also marks the anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands, which was adopted as an international treaty. This intergovernmental treaty, called the [Convention on Wetlands](#), was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975. It provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Since then, almost 90 per cent of UN member states, from all the world’s geographic regions, have acceded to become “Contracting Parties.”

Through the designation of protected areas, the implementation of effective policies and the sharing of knowledge, the Convention enables countries to take measures to protect their wetlands and to use them wisely. It has been adopted by 172 countries. Each country joining the Convention must designate at least one wetland to be included in the [list of Wetlands of International Importance \(Ramsar sites\)](#).

The celebration of World Wetlands Day in 2022 was especially significant — as on August 30, 2021 the UN General Assembly adopted [Resolution 75/317](#) that established February 02 as World Wetlands Day. Besides, it was also an occasion to commemorate the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1971. “Wetlands Action for People and Nature” was the theme for 2022 highlighting the importance of actions to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands for human and planetary health.

[World Wetlands Day 2023](#) aims to raise awareness about wetlands to reverse their rapid loss and encourage actions to conserve and restore them. This year’s theme is “It’s Time for Wetlands Restoration,” which highlights the urgent need to prioritize wetland restoration².



² <https://www.unep.org/events/un-day/world-wetlands-day-2023>

Ramsar Convention

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world.



The Convention Strategic Plan 2016-2024 includes a series of actions that are directly related to sustainable development including water, livelihoods, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, resilience and carbon sinks. Parties have also adopted a specific framework on water including river basin management, water allocation and ground water. The Secretariat is engaged in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as co-custodian with UNEP of indicator [SDG 6.6.1](#) and [Goals 14](#) and [15](#). It participates actively at the meetings of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals (IAEG-SDGs).

The [aim of the Ramsar list](#) is “to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits.”

There are currently over [2,400 Ramsar Sites around the world](#). They cover over 2.5 million square kilometres, an area larger than Mexico. The network of Ramsar Sites includes coastal and inland wetlands of all types. The Convention on Wetlands works to reverse wetland loss and degradation worldwide.

Wetlands in India – An Introduction

Wetlands have a deep connection with Indian culture and traditions. Loktak Lake in Manipur is revered as “Ima” (Mother) by locals, whereas Sikkim’s Khecheopalri Lake is popular as the “wish fulfilling lake”. The north Indian festival of Chhath is one of the most unique expressions of the association of people, culture, water and wetlands. The Dal Lake in Kashmir, Khajjiar Lake in Himachal Pradesh, Nainital Lake in Uttarakhand and Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu are popular tourism destinations. Wetlands find a mention even in Chanakya’s Arthashastra, where it is referred to as “anupa,” or incomparable lands, and considered sacred.³

Wetlands receive protection from several central rules and regulations. [Provisions of the Indian Forest Act, 1927](#), [the Forest \(Conservation\) Act, 1980](#) and the [Indian Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#), define the regulatory framework for wetlands located within forests and designated protected areas. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi making sustainability a key aspect of development, there has been an overall improvement in how India cares for its wetlands. As a

³Why India values wetland conservation by Union Minister of MOEFCC, Hindustan Times, dated February 05, 2022

result, [the country is now a land of 75 Ramsar Sites](#). This is the largest network of Ramsar Sites for any country in South Asia. The network of Indian Ramsar Sites currently covers 1.33 million ha, which is approximately 8% of the known wetland extent of the country.⁴



The Ramsar Sites in India are highly diverse. The contribution that Ramsar Sites make to biological diversity can hardly be over emphasised. A recent compilation of faunal diversity of 42 Indian Ramsar Sites by the Zoological Survey of India enlists 6200 species. For several of the faunal groups, these wetlands represent a significant share of the known diversity (for example, over one-third of recorded mammalian species, one-fifth of reptiles, and about two-thirds of known bird species). While the smallest Ramsar Site is just 19.75 ha in the area (Vembannur), the largest, the Sunderbans, spans 0.42 million ha.⁵

Millions of migratory birds flock to India, and wetlands are critical to this annual phenomenon. Ecologically dependent on wetlands, migratory waterbirds connect continents, hemispheres, cultures, and societies through their seasonal movements. Migration is a period of great vulnerability, when birds experience the highest mortality rates. The “stopover” sites provide migratory birds rest, protection from predators and inclement weather before moving on to the next leg of their journey. A diversity of wetland communities offers essential stopovers for birds. [The Central Asian Flyway](#) (CAF) is one of the nine global waterbird flyways; nearly 71 per cent of the migratory waterbirds of the CAF use India as a stopover site. Sustaining the health of India’s wetlands is thus crucial for maintaining the waterbird populations within the flyway.

While wetlands are globally under threat for many reasons, including water drainage, pollution, unsustainable use, invasive species, deforestation, and soil erosion, India is proudly reversing the global trend of shrinking wetlands.

The [Ramsar convention entered into force in India on February 01, 1982](#). Keoladeo National Park (in Rajasthan) and Chilika (in Odisha) were the first two sites to be placed on the Ramsar List by the Government of India.

During 2004-14, **seven wetlands in India were identified as Ramsar Sites** - two in Himachal Pradesh, two in Jammu & Kashmir, one in Tripura, one in Uttar Pradesh and one in Gujarat. [From the year 2014 till August 2022, 49 wetlands are identified as Ramsar Sites in India.](#)

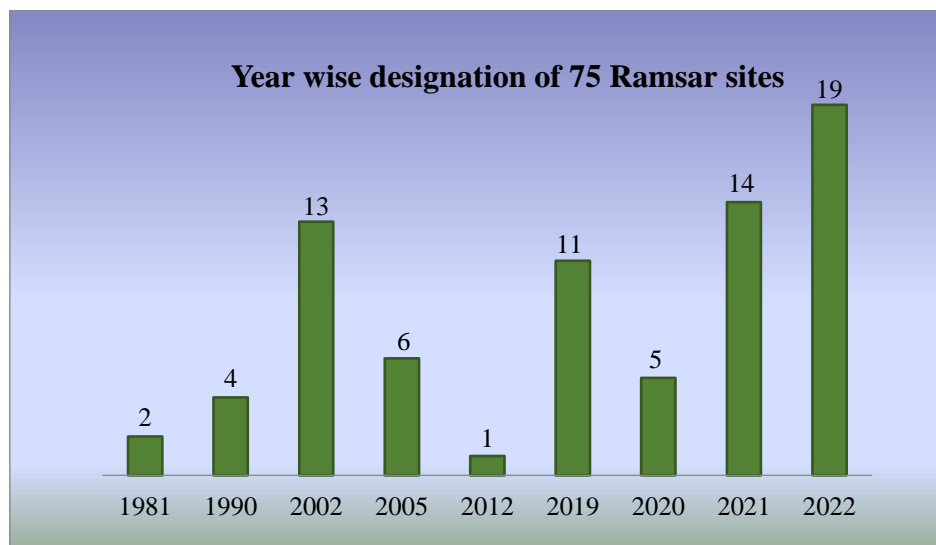
[On August 13, 2022 India added 11 wetlands to the list of Ramsar sites to make total 75 Ramsar sites in the country in the 75th year of Independence.](#) The 11 new sites include: Four (4) sites

⁴ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1886051>

⁵ [ibid](#)

in Tamil Nadu, Three (3) in Odisha, Two (2) in Jammu & Kashmir and One (1) each in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Earlier [on August 3, 2022, India added 10 wetlands to the list of Ramsar sites.](#) The 10 new sites include: Six (6) sites in Tamil Nadu and One (1) each in Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha.



[Source](#)

State wise list of Wetlands identified as Ramsar Sites in India (75)

S.No	States	No of Ramsar Sites	Name of Ramsar Site
1	Andhra Pradesh	1	Kolleru Lake
2	Assam	1	DeeporBeel
3	Bihar	1	Kabartal Wetland
4	Goa	1	Nanda Lake
5	Gujarat	4	Khijadia Wildlife Sanctuary
			Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary
			Thol Lake Wildlife Sanctuary
			Wadhvana Wetland
6	Haryana	2	Bhindawas Wildlife Sanctuary
			Sultanpur National Park
7	Himachal Pradesh	3	Chandertal Wetland
			Pong Dam Lake
			Renuka Wetland
8	Jammu & Kashmir	6	Wular Lake
			Hokera Wetland
			Surinsar-Mansar Lakes
			Tsomoriri Lake
			Hygam Wetland Conservation Reserve
			Shallbugh Wetland Conservation Reserve
9	Karnataka	1	Ranganathituu BS

10	Kerala	3	Asthamudi Wetland
			Sasthamkotta Lake
			VembanadKol Wetland
11	Ladakh	1	Tso Kar Wetland Complex
12	Madhya Pradesh	4	Bhoj Wetlands
			Sakhya Sagar
			Sirpur wetland
			Yashwant Sagar
13	Maharashtra	3	Lonar Lake
			NandurMadhameshwar
			Thane Creek
14	Manipur	1	Loktak Lake
15	Mizoram	1	Pala wetland
16	Orissa	6	Bhitarkanika Mangroves
			Chilka Lake
			Satkosia Gorge
			Tampara Lake
			Hirakud Reservoir
			Ansupa Lake
17	Punjab	6	Beas Conservation Reserve
			Harike Lake
			Kanjli Lake
			Keshopur-Miani Community Reserve
			Nangal Wildlife Sanctuary
			Ropar Lake
18	Rajasthan	2	Keoladeo Ghana NP
			Sambhar Lake
19	Tamil Nadu	14	Point Calimere Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary
			Karikili Bird Sanctuary
			Pallikaranai Marsh Reserve Forest
			Pichavaram Mangrove
			Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary
			Gulf of Mannar Marine Biosphere Reserve
			Vembannur Wetland Complex
			Vellode Bird Sanctuary
			Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary
			Udhayamarthandapuram Bird Sanctuary
			Chitrangudi Bird Sanctuary
			SuchindramTheroor Wetland Complex
Vaduvur Bird Sanctuary			
Kanjirankulam Bird Sanctuary			
20	Tripura	1	Rudrasagar Lake

21	Uttar Pradesh	10	Bakhira Wildlife Sanctuary
			Haiderpur Wetland
			Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary
			Parvati Agra Bird Sanctuary
			Saman Bird Sanctuary
			Samaspur Bird Sanctuary
			Sandi Bird Sanctuary
			SarsaiNawarJheel
			Sur Sarovar
			Upper Ganga River (Brijghat to Narora Stretch)
22	Uttarakhand	1	Asan Conservation Reserve
23	West Bengal	2	East Kolkata Wetlands
			Sunderbans Wetland

- Since 1986, the MoEFCC has been implementing a national scheme (presently known as the [National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems](#)) to assist state governments in preparing and implementing integrated management plans for Ramsar sites and other priority wetlands. Ramsar sites receive legal protection under Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017. In June 2022, the Ministry also formulated the ‘Sahbhagita Guidelines’ outlining an “all of society” approach and governance framework for wetlands conservation in the country.⁶
- **Wetlands of India Portal** - knowledge hub for use of wetlands managers and stakeholders

On October 2, 2021, MoEFCC launched a web portal - ‘Wetlands of India’ giving details on wetlands of the country, which was launched by the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav. The portal is a single point access to all information relating to wetlands. The portal also hosts capacity building material, data repository, videos and information for students. Importantly, a dashboard for each State and UT has been developed to access the portal and populate it with information of wetlands in their administration.

Recent Developments

1. [Amrit Dharohar Scheme](#): While presenting the Union Budget 2023-24 on February 01, 2023, Union Finance Minister announced a new **Amrit Dharohar scheme**. This scheme will be implemented over the next three years to encourage optimal use of wetlands, and enhance bio-diversity, carbon stock, eco-tourism opportunities and income generation for local communities.
2. [As on August 13, 2022, India has 75 Ramsar Wetlands](#), making India the country with the highest number of Wetlands in South Asia.

⁶ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1886051>

3. [National Wetland Decadal Change Atlas prepared by the Space Applications Centre \(SAC\), Ahmedabad](#) highlights changes which have happened in Wetlands across the country in the past decade.

4. On August 14, 2021, [four wetlands from India got recognition from the Ramsar Secretariat as Ramsar sites](#).

- Haryana got two Ramsar site, Gujarat got three more after Nalsarovar which was declared in 2012.
- Thol Lake Wildlife Sanctuary from Gujarat lies on the Central Asian Flyway and more than 320 bird species can be found here. The wetland supports more than 30 threatened waterbird species, such as the critically endangered White-rumped Vulture and Sociable Lapwing, and the vulnerable Sarus Crane, Common Pochard and Lesser White-fronted Goose.
- Wadhvana Wetland from Gujarat is internationally important for its birdlife as it provides wintering ground to migratory waterbirds, including over 80 species that migrate on the Central Asian Flyway. These include some threatened or near-threatened species such as the endangered Pallas's fish-Eagle, the vulnerable Common Pochard, and the near-threatened Dalmatian Pelican, Grey-headed Fish-eagle and Ferruginous Duck.



5. On **World Wetland Day 2021**, MoEFCC announced the establishment of a Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management (CWCM)⁷, as a part of the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai, an institution under the Ministry.

⁷ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1694463>



Speaking at the launch, the Union Minister of State for Environment highlighted the importance of wetlands in providing various ecosystem services. “The dedicated Centre which is launched today would address specific research needs and knowledge gaps and will aid in the application of integrated approaches for conservation, management and wise use of the wetlands.”

5. In 2020, MoEFCC took up “[wetlands rejuvenation](#)” as a transformative idea. The programme is structured around a four-pronged approach: developing baseline information, rapid assessment of

wetlands’ condition using a set of parameters in the form of wetland health cards, enabling stakeholder platforms in the form of [wetland Mitra](#) (friend) and management planning. The programme has since been upscaled to cover over 500 wetlands.

6. [On World Wetlands Day 2021, Ministry of Jal Shakti highlighted that Namami Gange is the first of its kind programme where Wetland Conservation is integrated with Basin Management Plan.](#)

- Innovative work is done by the [National Mission for Clean Ganga \(NMCG\)](#) for wetland conservation linked to River Rejuvenation, which would help the entire country as a model framework.
- A massive scientific and community-based programme to develop Health card and management of 10 wetlands in each of the 50 plus Ganga districts was also launched.

7. In December 2020, [India added Tso Kar Wetland Complex in Ladakh as its 42nd Ramsar site](#), which is a second one in the Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh.

- The Tso Kar Basin is a high-altitude wetland complex, consisting of two principal waterbodies, StartsapukTso, a freshwater lake of about 438 hectares to the south, and Tso Kar itself, a hypersaline lake of 1800 hectares to the north, situated in the Changthang region of Ladakh, India. It is called Tso Kar, meaning white lake, because of the white salt efflorescence found on the margins due to the evaporation of highly saline water.
- The Tso Kar Basin is an A1 Category Important Bird Area (IBA) as per Bird Life International and a key staging site in the Central Asian Flyway. The site is also one of the most important breeding areas of the Black-necked Crane (*Grusnigricollis*) in India. This IBA is also the major breeding area for Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*), Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Brown-

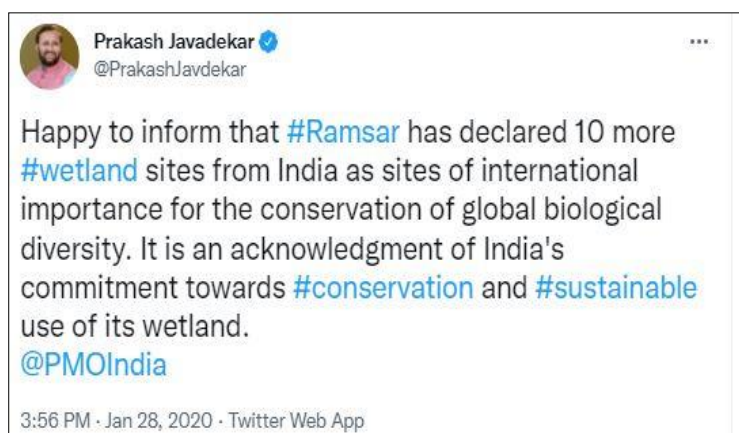
headed Gull (*Larusbrunnicephalus*), Lesser Sand-Plover (*Charadriusmongolus*) and many other species.

8. As on January 28, 2020, [10 more wetlands from India got the Ramsar site tag, Maharashtra got its first, Punjab added 3 and UP 6 to its list](#)⁸.

- In a major recognition towards Government of India's effort towards conservation, restoration and rejuvenation of its wetlands, Ramsar declared [10 more wetland sites from India as sites of international importance](#).

9. For [conservation and management of identified wetlands including Ramsar sites in the country](#), the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of National Wetlands Conservation Programme (NWCP) was implemented till the year 2012-13. To have better synergy and to avoid overlap, the NWCP has been merged in February, 2013 with another scheme called National Lake Conservation Plan (NLCP) into a new integrated scheme of '[National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Eco-systems](#)' (NPCA) for holistic conservation of lakes and wetlands.

10. [India's National Wildlife Action Plan](#) (2017-2031) identifies conservation of inland aquatic ecosystems as one of the 17 priority areas, and envisages the development of a national wetlands mission and a national wetlands biodiversity register as critical interventions. In



addition, integration of wetlands in river basin management has been identified as a strategy for the management of river systems.

11. In 2017, the Union [Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change](#) (MoEFCC) notified the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) [Rules under the Environment \(Protection\) Act, 1986](#) (EP Act). As per the

provisions of these rules, state wetlands authorities have been constituted as the main policy and regulatory bodies within states.

11. Further, under the EP Act, coastal wetlands are protected under the [Coastal Regulation Zone \(CRZ\) Notification \(2018\)](#) and its amendments and the Island [Protection Zone \(IPZ\) Notification 2011](#).

Conclusion

Wetlands are our [natural buffers against increasing risk of floods, droughts and tropical cyclones](#). Wetlands can act as sponges, storing peak rainfall and releasing water gradually during lean season. The floods in Kashmir Valley in September, 2014 and Chennai city in December, 2015 are reminders of the ways wetland destruction can make lives vulnerable. Evidences from Super Cyclone Kalinga of 1999, Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 and Phailin of 2013 underline the role coastal wetlands as estuaries and mangroves can play in buffering communities from impacts of these cyclones and wave surges.

⁸<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1600857>

Integration of wetlands within disaster risk reduction planning can be achieved by a series of collaborative actions between wetlands managers and those responsible for implementation of disaster risk reduction actions. Assessment of wetland ecosystem health should be made a part of District level disaster planning processes. Wetland management plans should have an in-built component of disaster risk reduction to address the likely impacts of disasters on ecosystem health. Wetlands conservation and restoration should be included within the suite of actions proposed for reducing disaster risk, particularly those related to water, food and climate security. States should constitute Wetland Authorities as nodal agencies for integrated policy, planning and regulation of wetlands. Representation of Disaster Management Authorities should be ensured within the State Wetland Authorities. Mass awareness campaigns should be undertaken to educate stakeholders from all walks of society, particularly local communities on the value of wetland ecosystems.

The Government of India accords high significance to wetlands conservation and seeks to mainstream its full range of values at all levels of developmental planning and decision-making.

Video links

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHDbE5HACvg>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P9OoWuTBdY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCOnE2ZgDHQ>

Twitter links

- <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/1619647149154897920?s=20&t=mMb4tjd4ZDMWlh1Al-rM93SldlyivXuPRweEoWxyZtQ>
- <https://twitter.com/byadavbjp/status/1426232561341108225>
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- <https://twitter.com/moefcc/status/1551882643167330309?s=20&t=7LNwylqjEFXiZGWNxBaSvq>
- <https://twitter.com/byadavbjp/status/1551812254315585537?s=20&t=7LNwylqjEFXiZGWNxBaSvq>
- <https://twitter.com/PrakashJavdekar/status/1327928897665519616>
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- <https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-wetlands-day>
- <https://www.epa.gov/wetlands/what-wetland>
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- <https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-wetlands-day>
- http://www.wiienvi.nic.in/Database/ramsar_wetland_sites_8224.aspx
- PIB Press Release on [India establishes Asia's largest Ramsar Sites network in the 75th Year of Independence](#) dated December 23, 2022.

- PIB Press Release on [75 Ramsar Sites in 75th Year of Independence](#) dated August 13, 2022.
- PIB Press Release on [India adds 10 more wetlands designated as Ramsar sites to make total 64 sites](#) dated August 3, 2022.
- PIB Press Release on [India Designates 5 New Ramsar Sites](#) dated July 26, 2022.
- PIB Press Release on [NamamiGange first program in India to link Wetland Conservation to Basin Management Plan](#) dated February 02, 2021.
- PIB Press Release on [Ladakh's Tso Kar Wetland Complex now a Wetland of International Importance](#) dated December 24, 2020.
- PIB Press Release on ['Wetlands of India' Portal, a single point access to all information relating to wetlands](#) dated October 02, 2021.
- PIB Press Release on [On World Wetlands Day India gets its first Centre for Wetland Conservation and Management](#) dated February 02, 2021.
- PIB Press Release on [10 more wetlands from India get the Ramsar site tag](#) dated January 28, 2020.

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