

ENVIRONMENT

India adds five more Ramsar sites, ups tally to 54

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Three of them are in Tamil Nadu and one each in Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram

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

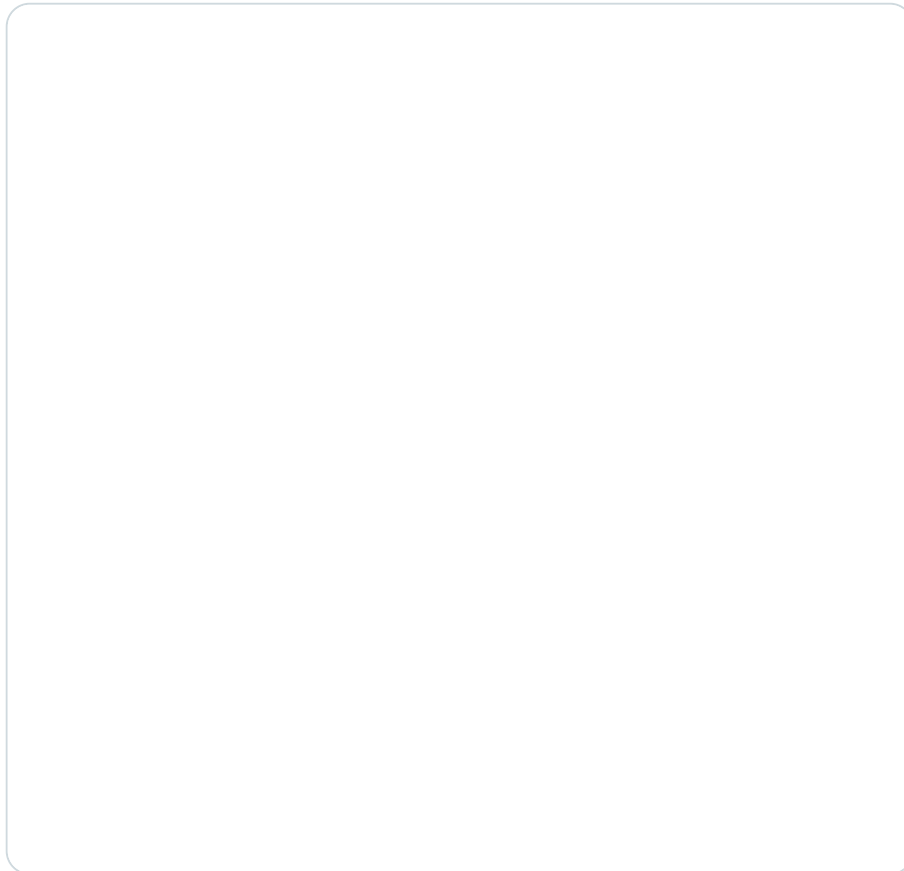
“Delighted to inform that 5 more Indian wetlands have got Ramsar recognition as wetlands of international importance,” Mr. Yadav tweeted.

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

Bhupender Yadav 

The emphasis PM Shri @narendramodiji has put on environmental protection and conservation has led to a marked improvement in how India treats its wetlands.

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India's Ramsar wetlands are spread over 11,000 sq km – around 10% of the total wetland area in the country – across 18 States. No other South Asian country has as many sites though this has much to do with India's geographical breadth and tropical diversity. The United Kingdom (175) and Mexico (142) – smaller countries than India – have the maximum Ramsar sites whereas Bolivia spans the largest area with 148,000 sq km under the Convention protection.

Tourism potential

that states and the Centre must ensure that these tracts of land are conserved and spared from man-made encroachment. Acquiring this label also helps with a locale's tourism potential and its international visibility. Until 1981, India had 41 Ramsar sites though the last decade has seen the sharpest rise – 13 – in designating new sites.

Wetlands, according to the Environment Ministry, are an “area of marsh, fen, peatland or water; whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres, but does not include river channels, paddy fields, human-made water bodies/ tanks specifically constructed for drinking water purposes and structures specifically constructed for aquaculture, salt production, recreation and irrigation purposes.”

To be Ramsar site, however, it must meet at least one of nine criteria as defined by the Ramsar Convention of 1961, such as supporting vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities or, if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds or, is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks are dependent upon.

The National Wetland Inventory and Assessment compiled by the Indian Space Research Organisation, estimates India's wetlands to span around 1,52,600 square kilometres which is 4.63% of the total geographical area of the country. A little over two-fifths are inland natural wetlands and about a quarter are coastal wetlands. India has 19 types of wetlands whereas Gujarat has the maximum area followed by Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Wetlands in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat serve as important spaces for migratory birds. Wetlands are also known to have among the highest soil-carbon densities and therefore play a major role in buffering carbon dioxide emissions.

