

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and Society of Wetland Scientists Renew Memorandum of Cooperation at SWS Europe Chapter Annual Meeting in Faro, Portugal

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Secretary General Martha Rojas-Urrego and Society of Wetland Scientists President Gillian Davies signed and renewed the *Ramsar Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands – Society of Wetland Scientists Memorandum of Cooperation* at the SWS Europe Chapter Annual Meeting in Faro, Portugal, on Friday, May 5. This Memorandum creates the framework for collaboration between the two organizations during the 2017 – 2023 timeframe.

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands, and includes 169 Contracting Parties and 2,266 Ramsar Sites throughout the world. The Ramsar Convention and SWS share objectives for protecting, conserving, restoring and sustainably managing wetlands around the world, as well as providing wetlands education and outreach. As the Memorandum notes, “The Convention on Wetlands and the SWS recognize the fundamental role played by wetlands in regulating and providing water, in supporting maintenance of cultural and biological diversity, in ensuring high ecosystem integrity, in regulating climate and in providing ecosystem services and benefits for people and the planet.”



Ramsar Convention Secretary General Martha Rojas-Urrego and SWS President Gillian Davies sign and renew the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands – Society of Wetland Scientists Memorandum of Cooperation.

SWS is an observer organization to the Convention on Wetlands, has a Ramsar Section, is a representative to the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel and collaborates with Ramsar across a wide range of initiatives. Most recently, the SWS Ramsar Section has collaborated with the Ramsar Convention, the World Wetland Network, and Wildfowl & Wetland Trust to initiate a citizen science [wetland assessment](#) of the condition of the world's wetlands in order to better understand the condition of the world's wetlands. In addition, the Ramsar Convention will be presenting a webinar as part of the [SWS webinar series](#) in June.



From left to right: SWS Europe Chapter President-Elect Mathew Simpson, SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven, Ramsar Convention Secretary General Martha Rojas-Urrego, SWS President Gillian Davies, SWS President-Elect Arnold Van der Valk, SWS Ramsar Section Chair Nick Davidson.

The Europe Chapter has been establishing and developing important liaisons with other societies that work in Europe, and this year partnered with the European Pond Conservation Network (EPCN) to hold a joint Annual Meeting and field trips. Members and leaders of several societies, as well as members of other SWS chapters, attended the SWS-EPCN meeting in Faro. At the meeting, the Europe Chapter signed two Memoranda of Cooperation with fellow societies: Wetland Pollutant Dynamics and Control (WETPOL) and Constructed Wetlands Association (CWA). WETPOL is an organization that brings scientists, engineers and practitioners together to focus on the use of wetlands for water quality improvement.



SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven signs Memorandum of Cooperation with WETPOL's Diederik Rousseau.

CWA promotes the application of constructed wetland technologies to address water pollution issues. Additionally, the SWS Europe Chapter is a member society in the Mediterranean Wetland Alliance. Because Europe borders the Mediterranean, and conference programming included presentations on Mediterranean wetlands, the meeting drew attendees from the Mediterranean region of North Africa, as well as Europe.



SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven signs Memorandum of Cooperation with Constructed Wetland Association's and SWS Europe Chapter President-Elect Matthew Simpson.

Further, meeting attendees signed the *Call to Action to Halt the Degradation of Islands' Wetlands of the Mediterranean Basin*, which, "...extends a pledge to all interested parties, including the national Governments, the European Commission, local authorities and administrations, academia, the NGO community, donor agencies, and the public, on the urgent need to conserve the important wetland ecosystems of the Mediterranean Islands." In addition, it "Invites the Ramsar Secretariat to further support the National Governments to designate small islands wetlands in the List of Wetlands of International Importance" and "Invites the Secretariat to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocol to further urge the Mediterranean countries for the ratification of the ICZM Protocol." Read the [full document](#).

Kudos to Ph.D. student Dan Roberts and faculty advisor Chris Freeman, both of whom attended the Faro meeting, for launching the first SWS student association outside the U.S., at Bangor University in Wales, where over 30 students have gotten involved.



From left to right: SWS President Gillian Davies, Bangor University Student Association President Dan Roberts, faculty advisor Chris Freeman, SWS President-Elect Arnold Van der Valk, SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven.

The Europe Chapter presented an oral presentation award to Sophie-Bo Heinkel and a poster award to Javier Pérez. Congratulations to these students for their excellent work! SWS would also like to thank Ph.D. student Afrah Saad Al-Mahfadi for travelling from Morocco, where she is studying at Mohammed V University, to attend the SWS Europe Chapter meeting. Afrah is a member of our International Chapter and gave an outstanding presentation on her project to survey all the wetlands in her home country of Yemen, a task that had not yet been addressed by wetland scientists. We look forward to hearing more from these capable students as their wetlands careers develop.



SWS President Gillian Davies, SWS International Chapter member and Ph.D. student Afrah Saad Al-Mahfadi and SWS Europe Chapter President Jos Verhoeven prepare to tour Doñana National Park.

A special highlight of the meeting was the keynote presentation, “Doñana on a tightrope”, given by Eva Hernández, and the field trip to Doñana National Park, which is a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, a UNESCO World Heritage site and is part of a larger Biosphere Reserve. Doñana is a refuge for six million birds that migrate between Europe and Africa, as well as wild boars, lynx, red deer, fallow deer, wild horses and more. The wild horses appear to be a facultative wetland species, enjoying grazing in both wetlands and uplands!



Wild horses graze near egrets, with flamingos in the distance, at Doñana National Park.

Although the physical area of Doñana has been protected, it continues to be threatened by significant groundwater withdrawal, agricultural and mining industry runoff and dredging of the Guadalquivir River. Climate change further exacerbates these threats. Thanks to the efforts of Jos Verhoeven, participants toured a restricted area with extensive biodiversity.



SWS Europe Chapter members on field trip to the Doñana National Park.

SWS loyalty runs strong in Europe, as every single SWS Europe Chapter past president attended the Europe Chapter Annual Meeting. One of the best things about joining SWS, and getting actively involved, is the friendships that form and persist through decades of professional work. We should note that wetland scientists are a very special and enjoyable group of people who work to address some of the most pressing problems facing our world, all while wading through every possible variety of wetland that the world has to offer. If you have not renewed your membership, please do so right away!



SWS Europe Chapter past and current presidents stand in order of presidency from left to right: Chris Freeman, Rob McInnis, Jan Vymazal, Jos Verhoeven, Mathew Simpson and Dominik Zak (not pictured). Matt assumed office during the Chapter Meeting.