

Ramsar and CMS Advisory Mission to Mozambique



Marromeu, Mozambique, 16 – 20 August 2009 – A Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) on the Marromeu Complex took place in Mozambique last week. As Mozambique is the latest country to join CMS, becoming a Party on 1 August 2009, CMS Information and Capacity-building Officer Francisco Rilla, an ornithologist, took part in the mission.

Marromeu Complex is Mozambique's only Ramsar site, making it a "Wetland of International Importance". It was declared a Ramsar site in 2004 because of its unique ecosystems and huge abundance of waterfowl species. During the dry season alone, 30% of the world's population of Wattled Cranes comes to the site for feeding and roosting.

However, in recent years plans have been made to explore the area's oil and gas resources. Drilling sites are bound to threaten the habitat of numerous species. To advise the government of Mozambique on how to mitigate these threats and to ensure compliance with Ramsar obligations, an Advisory Mission was established to discuss the problems on site.

The RAM participants, who consisted of Ramsar Senior Advisor for Africa, Mr Abou Bamba, Ramsar consultant David Pritchard and Francisco Rilla of CMS met the Deputy Minister of the Ministry for the Co-ordination of Environmental Affairs (MICOA) as well as representatives of WWF, IUCN, the National Institute of Petroleum and other interested parties in Maputo.

To get an overview of the Marromeu Complex, the RAM group members flew to Beira, located close to the Ramsar site where they met the Provincial Director for the Coordination of Environmental Affairs and the Administrator of nearby Cheringoma district. Representatives from local communities provided an even greater insight and explained their view on the oil and gas prospecting activities and the threats they are facing. Many local farmers and fishermen rely on the floodplain for their livelihood and are dependant on the ecosystem remaining intact.

Afterwards, a visit the area was undertaken and potential threats to its fauna reviewed. Major problems are the contamination of soil, fresh water and groundwater resources, which affect all affiliated organisms, as this leads to diseases and even death of flora and fauna. Additionally, the proposed drilling sites are located within the pristine forest areas of the Marromeu Complex. To reach these locations, new roads must be built, leading to a loss of habitat for

many species of animals. Furthermore, the new roads will open the path for increased illegal hunting possibilities and timber exploration.