

# The importance of Himalayan wetlands

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FOR MOUNTAINS AND PEOPLE

The Himalayan wetlands include among others glaciers, glacial valleys, glacial lakes, ice lakes, rivers, permafrost, peatlands, wet meadows, and freshwater springs. The wetlands located at altitudes above 3000 masl are considered to be a special group – the high altitude wetlands. The wetlands are intricately linked to the culture, traditions, and livelihoods of the mountain people, but they are highly vulnerable to change, especially global warming, land use change, and changes in habitats and the water regime, as well as to unmanaged human actions.

**The Hindu Kush-Himalayas are the water tower of Asia.** The high Himalayan and Asian ranges contain more than 112,000 sq.km of ice and snow and the headwaters of ten major Asian rivers.



**Wetland biodiversity** includes floating and submersed plants, microbes, animals, fish, birds, and insects. Migratory birds like the black-necked crane, endangered species like the Himalayan newt, and economically valuable species are an integral part of the wetlands ecosystem.

**Himalayan wetlands** provide freshwater, food, fuelwood, and fodder; regulate and purify water; and store carbon in soil and peat. They help stabilise local environments and the adjoining landscapes.



**Socioeconomically the wetlands** are sacred sites associated with people's religious beliefs, myths, and folklore and often seen as places of spiritual transformation and artistic inspiration. Wetlands influence people's livelihoods through tourism, livestock raising, fishing, and others.

## Conserving the Himalayan wetlands

ICIMOD is supporting the Ramsar Convention Secretariate through the Himalayan Wetlands Initiative. The Initiative promotes the conservation and sustainable use of mountain wetlands in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region through an ecosystem approach. It supports the wise use of wetlands by bridging the science-policy divide and promoting local culture and traditional knowledge for sustaining ecosystem functions and services.



**Photos:** Alex Treadway and ICIMOD staff

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