

## **Bañados del Río Dulce y Laguna Mar Chiquita (Córdoba - Argentina)**

The Ramsar site “Bañados del Río Dulce y Laguna Mar Chiquita” has about 1,000,000 ha. The lake at its maximum level has an area of 7,000 sq Km, being the largest lake in Argentina and the fifth largest saline lake in the world. A region of great biodiversity richness is also a provincial reserve and a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site. Despite of this local and international importance Mar Chiquita lacks a management plan. PROMAR and Fundación MAR are working permanently to achieve it.

Because our main goal is promoting conservation and sustainable development of the Mar Chiquita Ramsar site, during the last 5 years we have been working intensively in the protected area conducting different activities carried out through Mar Chiquita Field Station, in Miramar.

In environmental education our communication strategy was the dissemination of related issues through the media (radio and regional newspapers, public meetings), addressing the general ecology of the lake and the wetlands well as the importance of their conservation. We also develop training courses for teachers and students of the Mar Chiquita region and extensive outreach campaigns.

Many researchers of the National University of Córdoba are working on baseline studies on the lake and wetland areas that include shorebird habitat conservation, assessment of deforestation and selection of candidate areas for conservation, flamingo ecology and conservation and lake monitoring (water level, salinity, limnology, etc.). Also students of the Master Program in Wildlife Management develop their thesis in the area. All the information produced will be useful for the future Management Plan.

We are permanently performing an intensive activity promoting the need for a management plan.

As a first step we produced a book that summarizes present knowledge about the protected area. This book was distributed to municipalities, libraries and schools of Mar Chiquita region and government agencies related to planning to provide baseline information for future management plan.

We also provide technical support to municipalities in sustainable development projects.

As a result of marked rainfall increase in Mar Chiquita basin started in the 1970's, the lake water level rose about 10 m. After peaking in 2003 the lake level started to decrease steadily. As a consequence, large salty mudflats were generated, which produced huge salt clouds extending up to about 350 km. Given that the salt dust problem is connected with water appropriation in the upper tributaries, PROMAR and Fundación MAR produced a compendium of legislation regarding water management in Mar Chiquita to be included in the Management Plan. We also contacted with the Salí-Dulce Basin Committee, main tributary of the lake, which comprises five Argentine provinces plus the national government. The management of the water of this river is crucial for Mar Chiquita because represents about 80% of the water input to the system.

Our organizations promote the formation of the Advisory Committee of the Reserve where all stakeholders are represented including the provincial government.

We believe that our presence in provincial and national mass media is important to install problems and management issues in the political agenda

We want to continue developing a blue print for Management Plan of Mar Chiquita Ramsar Site including a series of public meetings expanding our outreach activities into a larger, regional scale including other key towns.

In May 2011 we will organize the 11th Meeting of International Society of Salt Lake Research in Miramar to which all members of Living Lakes are invited.