



East Atlantic Flyway Youth Forum 2025

From Policy to Practice: Opportunities to bring
Wetlands COP Decisions to Life

East Atlantic Flyway Youth Forum 2025

On 11 and 12 October 2025 the East Atlantic Flyway Youth Forum convened online under the title *From Policy to Practice: Opportunities to bring Wetlands COP Decisions to Life*. Organized again by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, Migratory Birds for People, and Youth Engaged in Wetlands.

Forty two people took part over the two days, representing 17 countries, with 18 youth attending the bulk of the forum. Thirteen people presented on the first day, at least nine of whom were under the age of 30. On day two Melike Hemmami led the training aspect, and we concluded with a World Café moderated by Joie Didier Sossoukpe.

How to strengthen the youth's role in the implementation of the Convention of Wetlands?

The participants identified essential non-financial resources they need to implement the Convention: technical training, strong local networks and access to government contacts. They highlighted the need for national governments, including Convention on Wetlands National Focal Points, to enable youth-led efforts in wetland conservation.

Building trust and maintaining regular communication with government stakeholders is key to youth inclusion.

A potential next step is to draft and send a joint advocacy letter to Convention on Wetlands focal points illustrating the benefits of youth inclusion, and to develop supportive structures like mentorship and dedicated funding.

More details on the outcomes of the youth discussion during the World Café can be found in the summary below.

Feedback

Five participants contributed to the post-Forum survey. Their average rating for the Forum was 4.4/5.



“connecting projects is key, many stakeholders and variables to consider, first learn a lot about the matter before you get active.”

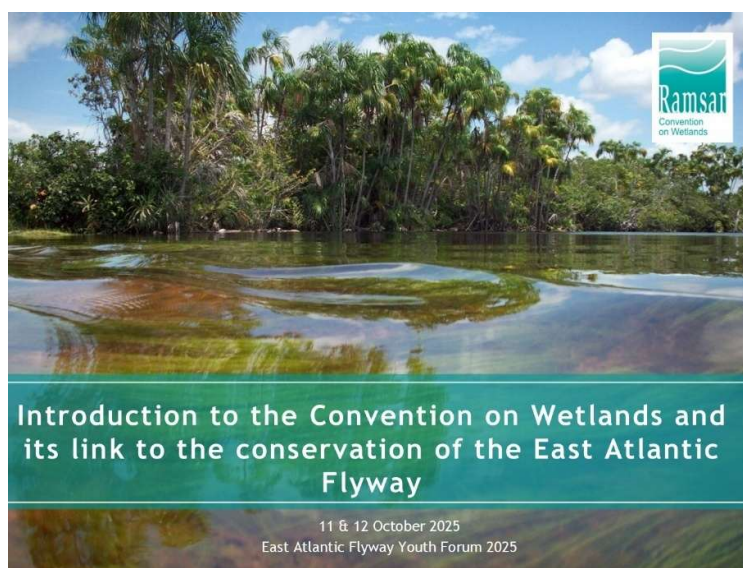
“It gave me an opportunity to learn about how other youth members are campaigning and representing youth in the conservation sector.”

“Youth with ideas must align with organizations with similar interests to tackle environmental issues affecting migratory birds and pollinators.”

2. Now that you have attended the Forum, how do you rate your level of confidence in implementing aspects of Wetlands COP15?



Summary



The new technical assistant for Africa at the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands, Gbenou Justin Didolanvi set the scene for the Forum. He introduced the Convention, and how it operates, including how Ramsar Regional Initiatives and Ramsar Sites relate to the East Atlantic Flyway.

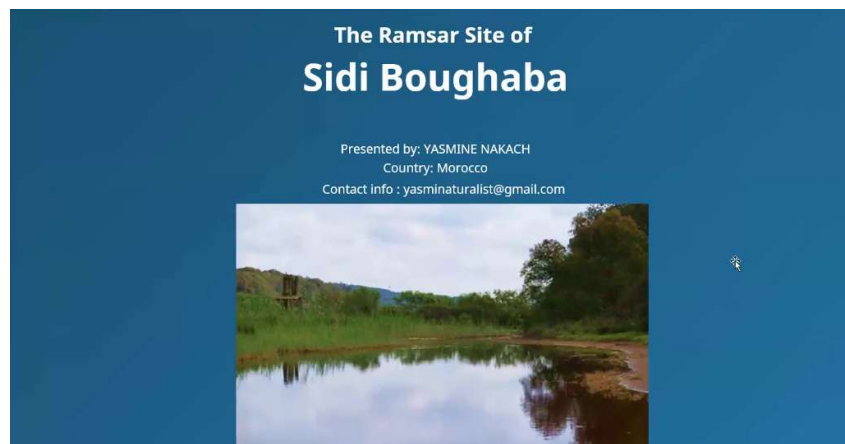


Youth presentations: Ramsar Sites along the East Atlantic Flyway

Three of the youth participants shared information about their own connections to particular Ramsar Sites.



Veronica L. Aggrey of Ghana's EPA introduced the Keta Lagoon and the 'Keta Model' she is developing to fill the enforcement gaps in managing the lagoon.



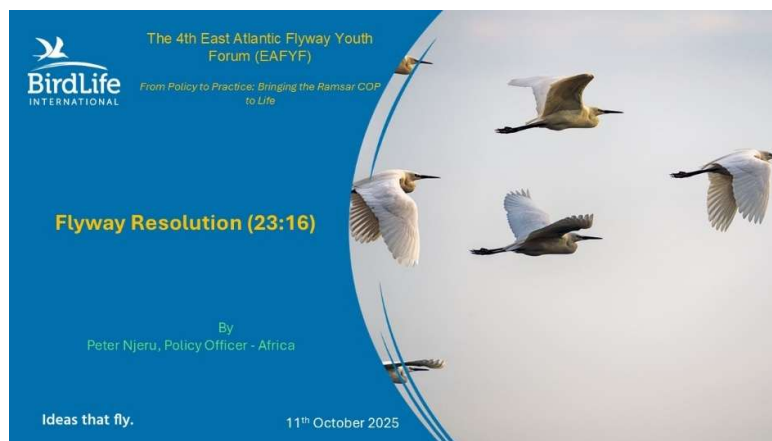
Yasmine Nakach introduced the Sidi Boughaba Ramsar Site in Morocco, where the challenges include climate change and urban pressure. She also described the EUFLYNET Bird Ringing School, the first of its kind in Africa.





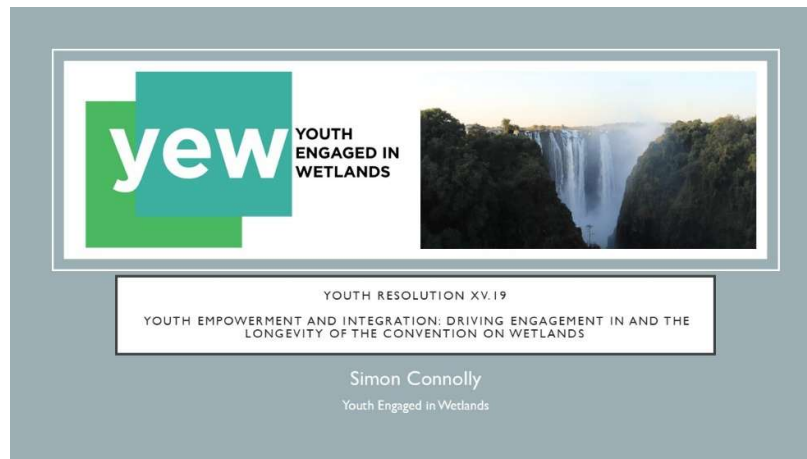
Carolina Mañoso and Alana Bell presented about Camargue in France and the diverse wetlands roles they fill at Tour du Valat, within the delta, as European Volunteers, which cover reptile and bird species work in the wetland and in the office.

Relevant COP15 Resolutions



Peter Njeru, Policy Officer – Africa for BirdLife International introduced the Resolution on strengthening national actions for the conservation and restoration of waterbird flyways and critical sites. The Spring Alive project is a platform for youth action in our flyway. Key youth roles include fundraising, data collection, GIS mapping, peer training, and advocacy.





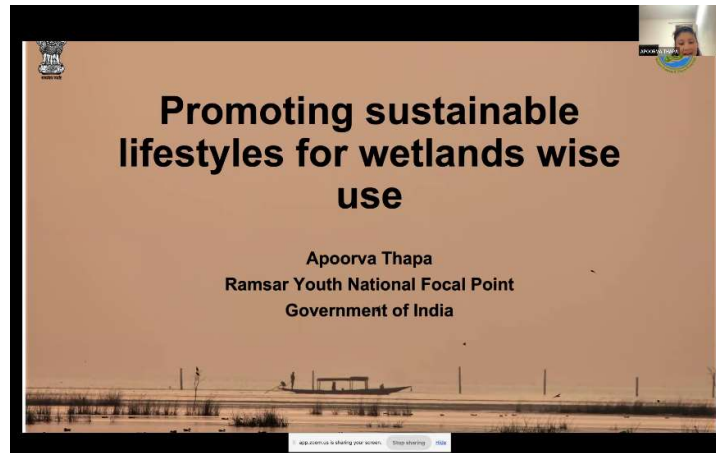
YEW's Knowledge and Capacity Building Officer Simon Connolly joined from the USA where it was early in the morning, to talk about the Youth Resolution. The previous youth Resolution had set the scene for increased youth participation at COP15, Youth Focal Points, the Youth Working Group, and events. The Resolution draft had input from youth, with consultations with countries at COP, and was adopted. The reflections were: Youth participation is growing – but still under-resourced; Alignment with Contracting Parties is crucial; Youth can meaningfully shape resolutions; Need for institutionalised support for YFPs & YWG; Digital tools & language access remain barriers; Momentum must continue during intersessional periods; Resolution is a step, not a destination.

People and Wetlands – The Convention on Wetlands
Communication, capacity building, education,
participation and awareness (CEPA) Programme



Connor Walsh of WWT introduced the CEPA Resolution, showing the participants how they can access the text on Ramsar.org, and identified two potential avenue for youth implementation of the Resolution: for a few, the potential of a role on the CEPA Oversight Panel; and making sure their governments know about youth-led CEPA activities, to include in their national reports to COP16. Wetland Link International offers free CEPA resources. World Wetlands Day, social media, ecosystem services, and university partnerships are all avenues to implementing the Resolution.





Sustainable lifestyles - Apoorva Thapa, the Youth Focal Point of India spoke on the promoting sustainable lifestyles for wetlands wise use, which boils down to ways of living, social behaviours, and choices. The national approach to this was launched by India's Prime Minister.

Introduced Mission SahBhagita, Indian initiative promoting eco-conscious living and community involvement in wetland stewardship where two million people helped ground-truth 170,000 wetlands. Incorporating 'young in spirit' into 'youth' can facilitate sustainable choices.

Youth Focal Points



Tandeka Ndlela, YEW Co-Lead and Youth Focal Point for Eswatini, explained how as an academic she took the role to link her county's peatlands to global policy spaces. She was appointed by the government due to her reputation, and is unpaid. When doing university research she organized local high schools to join her. She sat on the Convention's Youth Working Group and represents Africa in the current one.

Her reflections from COP: Youth representation must be backed by resources; Meaningful participation happens between the plenary sessions; African youth are underrepresented, but not underactive; The importance of informal spaces and solidarity.



Ramsar Youth Focal Points

Moritz Röhlke – Ramsar Youth Focal Point Germany

Moritz Röhlke is the first Youth Focal Point for Germany, a voluntary role while he studies for a Master's degree in Applied Biology. It was an open application process. He was funded to attend COP15 – travel, accommodation, and a daily allowance, which is a new administrative challenge for most students. He connects with relevant youth by email and social media, and hopes to participate in the Youth Working Group in the future.

He hopes all Youth Focal Points can attend COP in the future, and influence negotiations. They are appointed by the National Focal Points sending an official letter to the Secretariat nominating a candidate.

From Policy to Practice

The first steps of youth engagement in the Ramsar Convention

Elise Allely-Ferme

Senior Technical Officer – Coasts and Deltas, Wetlands International

Previously – Lead of Youth Engaged in Wetlands (2017- 2023)

Elise Allely-Ferme helped set up YEW in 2017, and now works for Wetlands International. She celebrated the activity and topics of the Forum and youth progress since then. She shared her journey from youth engagement to professional conservation work. Her journey started in a Junior Europe role at the Convention on Wetlands' Secretariat, equivalent to our previous speaker Gbenou Justin Didolanvi's Africa role today. Despite being the first Multilateral Environmental Agreement, it was one of the last to formally engage youth. She recommends frequently referring to the ladder of youth engagement, as well as frequently reflecting on progress and purposes.



YEW partnerships included launching the first Flyway Youth Forum, with the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership, and a year later the first East Atlantic Flyway Youth Forum. Then they worked with the governments of Costa Rica and Australia to submit a Draft Resolution on youth to COP14.

Day 2

Day two consisted of training in policy-to-practice and a World Café to progress youth perspectives for the next three years.

Training



Our trainer Melike Hemmami has 20+ years of experience facilitating change processes and innovation for sustainability. She has worked extensively on wetlands and protected areas, including Ramsar Sites, and has trained Ramsar and Wetland areas practitioners internationally. Her expertise spans participatory planning, capacity building, and multi-stakeholder processes, with a strong focus on CEPA, lobbying, and advocacy to support conservation and sustainable development.

The sessions were interactive and used online whiteboards as well as Zoom's chat and open mic feedback. Topics included stakeholder mapping, how MEAs connect to national or regional regulations, CEPA, advocacy, and the policy development cycle.



East Atlantic Flyway Youth Forum 2025 - From Policy to Practice: Opportunities to bring Ramsar COP Decisions to Life

Policy-To-Practice: Dream, Map, Act

12th of October 2025, Sunday



World Café outputs

The World Café workshopped approaches to implementing the Resolutions which had been presented over the course of the Forum.

Flyway Conservation (Resolution XV.16):



- The most urgent threats include habitat degradation caused by urban expansion, agriculture, overfishing, water pollution, and the impacts of climate change.
- Youth can lead public awareness campaigns, support community-based monitoring, and contribute to climate adaptation planning.
- Innovative actions include creating bird clubs in rural schools, launching mobile apps (e.g., for citizen science like CyberTracker), and using social media for education and advocacy.

Youth Empowerment (Resolution XV.19):

- Key barriers are lack of access to information, limited policy connections, underestimation of youth contributions, and insufficient knowledge among youth about wetlands.
- Youth can organize themselves, build networks, and advocate for formal roles such as national Ramsar Youth Focal Points to bridge the gap with policymakers.
- Greater recognition of youth as stakeholders, mentorship opportunities, and funding support are needed to ensure meaningful engagement.

Sustainable Lifestyles (Resolution XV.20):

- Common unsustainable practices include overfishing, salt mining, excessive fertilizer use, and plastic waste pollution.
- Youth can lead community-based awareness projects and organize wetland/beach cleanups to promote responsible behaviour.
- Initiatives like a 'waste-free wetland challenge' and advocacy for sustainable agriculture can drive positive lifestyle changes.

CEPA (Resolution XV.6):

- A major misconception is that wetlands are 'wastelands', which leads to dumping and undervaluation of their services.
- Public campaigns should highlight the ecological and economic value of wetlands, focusing on the benefits they bring to biodiversity and human well-being.
- Targeted outreach should focus on urban communities, local markets, and students through educational and advocacy initiatives.

What's needed to launch youth-led actions?



- Essential non-financial resources include technical training, strong local networks (youth, communities, officials), and access to government contacts.
- National governments, including Convention on Wetlands National Focal Points, are critical to enable youth-led efforts in wetland conservation efforts.
- Building trust and maintaining regular communication with government stakeholders is key to youth inclusion.

Youth Empowerment – What’s the first step?

- A potential next step is to draft and send a joint advocacy letter to Ramsar focal points illustrating the benefits of youth inclusion.
- The development of supportive structures like mentorship (advisors) and dedicated funding are also necessary to sustain youth advocacy.

Advocacy – how can digital tools scale youth initiatives?

- Digital tools like social media can be used to organize cleanup campaigns, form youth groups, and amplify stories of local action through digital storytelling.
- A ‘Wetland Youth Livelihood Challenge’ can showcase youth-led solutions to environmental issues along the flyway (digital storytelling)
- Key message: ‘Youth actions protect wetlands – act local, impact global.’

Contact the organisers

Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative: Kristine Meise, Programme Officer at the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat wsfi@waddensea-secretariat.org

Migratory Birds for People: Connor Walsh, International Engagement Officer at the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust wli@wwt.org.uk

Youth Engaged in Wetlands: Hugo Ferreira, European Regional Representative at Youth Engaged in Wetlands youthengagedinwetlands@gmail.com

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