

WETLANDS IN GUYANA

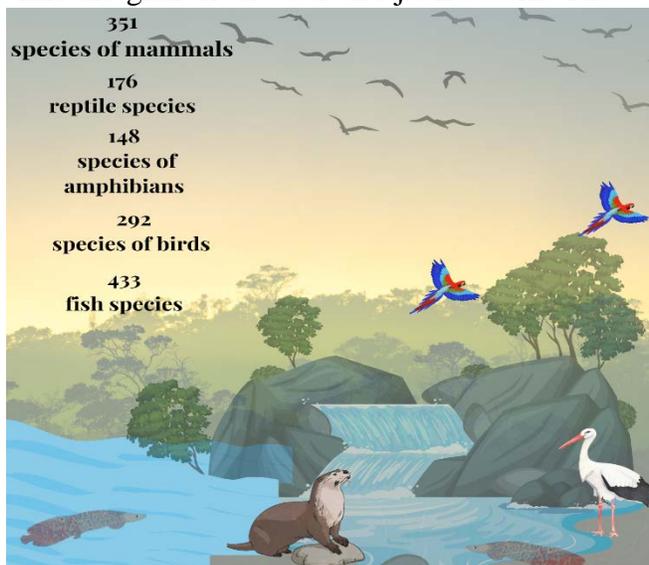
Wetlands are often regarded as nature’s unsung heroes, silently performing crucial roles that sustain both ecosystems and human life. These waterlogged landscapes are vital in purifying water, controlling floods, and storing carbon. Wetlands can be found all over the world, ranging from mangroves and coastal estuaries to inland floodplains and swamps.

Every year, World Wetlands Day, celebrated on February 2, serves as a reminder of the importance of these ecosystems. Guyana, is home to a wide variety of wetland ecosystems, from coastal mangroves to inland floodplains. These wetlands can be found in all ten administrative regions, providing essential services such as water filtration, flood prevention, and soil erosion control. In addition to their environmental benefits, they also serve as vital economic resources. Fishing, farming, and ecotourism all rely heavily on the health of these wetlands, making them indispensable to the livelihoods of local communities.



The Shell Beach Protected Area.

Guyana’s wetlands are among the most ecologically significant in the region. The Shell Beach mangrove ecosystem is home to endangered sea turtles, while the Essequibo River Estuary provides crucial protection against coastal erosion and supports local fisheries. Further inland, the Rupununi Wetlands in southwestern Guyana are a haven for rare species like the giant river otter and jabiru stork. These wetlands are also vital for the local Indigenous communities who have lived alongside them for generations, using the land and water for food, medicine, and cultural practices and has over the years become a ecotourism hotspot with views of the majestic Pakaraima Mountain range.



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Guyana’s North Rupununi Wetland (NRW), is a 9,018² kilometre of savannahs, freshwater lakes, and creeks, located in region 9, Upper Takutu- Upper Essequibo. It is Guyana’s largest known wetland. This wetland forms a critical link between the Amazon Basin and the Essequibo River system. Rich in biodiversity, it is home to

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over 1,400 species of vertebrates, including 430 fish species, 240 bird species, and mammals like the giant river otter. The Arapaima, one of the world's largest freshwater fish, thrives in these waters. Every year, during the May-September wet season, rainfall and run-off from the highlands floods the savannah and forests, replenishing fish stocks and maintaining the wetland's ecosystem, ensuring a sustainable food source for both wildlife and the twenty-one local communities that surround this landscape.

For the people of Guyana, including those in and adjacent to the North Rupununi Wetlands, this landscape is more than just a resource it is a vital part of our cultural heritage, livelihood, and national identity. The wetlands provide many resources including fish, medicinal plants, and materials for housing and crafts, while also serving as an adventurous tourist destination. A combination of traditional and modern knowledge has allowed us to manage these resources sustainably for generations. The seasonal flooding, which replenishes water sources and promotes biodiversity, is essential to our environment, food security, economic activities, and cultural traditions.



The North Rupununi Wetlands

Like many wetlands worldwide, Guyana recognises the critical role these ecosystems play in biodiversity conservation and sustaining livelihoods. As a result, significant efforts are underway to protect, conserve, and manage them effectively. Collaborative initiatives are strengthening wetland management to ensure their long-term sustainability.

One such initiative is the Amazon Sustainable Landscape II (ASL) Project, which includes mapping and monitoring resource use, conducting biodiversity assessments, and building capacity within North Rupununi communities and its stakeholders to sustainably manage the lands and resources in the North Rupununi Wetlands. These efforts also contribute to Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy by enhancing carbon sequestration, improving water storage, strengthening biodiversity protection, and preserving the cultural heritage of the peoples of Guyana. Protecting the North Rupununi Wetlands is crucial to preserving one of Guyana's most valuable ecosystems.

By committing to sustainable development, we can ensure these wetlands continue to thrive, benefiting the environment, wildlife, and the people who depend on them for generations to come.

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