

ABSTRACT

Wetlands have received increasing attention worldwide over the past twenty years. An international treaty convention (Convention of Wetlands of international importance for waterfowl, Ramsar 1971) to which Sri Lanka is a party, seeks to protect wetlands to feed people, protect them from floods and pollution, and sustain wildlife.

The Bellanwila-Attidiya marshland was declared as a sanctuary by the Department of Wildlife Conservation on July 25th, 1990, on account of its importance as one of the few remaining freshwater wetlands in the western coastal plains of the country. This marshland supports a wide array of wildlife while regulating storm water and controlling floods in this densely inhabited and built-up suburb. It also supports several important socio-economic activities..

Although the present legal status as a sanctuary provides habitat protection, it is not properly enforced due to several constraints. The marshland is owned both by private land owners and state. The management of the marshland is imperative at this point as it is fast deteriorating and shrinking in extent. The current study was carried out with the intention of assessing existing ecological conditions to gather baseline data for the development of a management plan. The main areas covered in the study are land use changes and developments and marshland vegetation. The benefits and values of the marshland and human interferences were also documented based on author's observations. The current study shows that the marshland is under heavy pressure as land for urban development. A considerable portion of the marshland has already been reclaimed for urban development and the encroachments within the marshland are on the rise. The wildlife populations are greatly threatened by industrial effluents, domestic wastes, and human sewage. Recommendations were made based on the findings of this study for improved resource management of the marshland.