

Foreword

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In August 2008, the 8th INTECOL Wetland Conference was held in Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, Brazil, under the leadership of the Federal University of Mato Grosso (UFMT) and the Center of Pantanal Research (CPP) with the title: “Big Wetlands, Big Concerns”. It was the first time that this important wetland event took place in South America. Approximately 1,000 scientists and students from all over the world attended the well organized meeting, which provided the participants with the opportunity not only to discuss the most diverse aspects of wetland ecology but also to visit the nearby Pantanal, one of the most famous wetlands in the world.

Eight keynote speakers offered an overview of the worldwide state of wetland research: W. J. Mitsch reported on North and Central America, W. J. Junk on South America, H. Cízková on Europe, R. D. Robarts on Russia, S. An on China, B. Gopal on tropical Asia, S. A. Mitchell on Africa and C. M. Finlayson on Australia. The broad-ranging views left the audience well informed regarding the current state of our knowledge of wetlands, the emphasis given to wetland research in the different regions of the world, the role of wetlands in the regional economies and the related political issues, the different types of threats and stresses to these ecosystems, and the efforts for their protection. A major point of interest was the importance of wetlands for the global climate and the impact of the predicted climate changes on wetland integrity, function, and biodiversity. The speakers constructed a framework for the many lectures that followed during the event.

The meeting was very successful and had a strong impact on wetland science in Brazil. In the opening note of the Congress, to the great surprise and pleasure of most of the audience, a representative of the Brazilian Ministry of Science and Technology, announced the establishment of the National Pantanal Research Institute (INPP) at UFMT in Cuiabá. After 4 years, the institute is now nearly ready, with its inauguration and the start of research activities expected shortly. In addition, soon after the meeting a research network of leading wetland scientists established at the UFMT successfully competed in a new Brazilian Program for Science and Technology, winning approval and financing of the Brazilian Research Council (CNPq) for the new National Institute of Science and Technology in Wetlands (INCT-INAU). This network has now been in place for 3 years, with research being conducted in the Pantanal of Mato Grosso as well as the large wetlands along the Paraná, Araguaia, and Guaporé Rivers. Members of the network are also engaged in political activities aimed at improving sustainable management and wetland protection.

This special volume of *Aquatic Sciences* presents an elaboration of the keynote talks, with supplementary information in most cases contributed by co-authors, to offer a truly comprehensive overview of the above-mentioned topics. A synthesis chapter, with a comparative summary of the facts, has also been included. This special volume provides a solid basis of worldwide knowledge regarding wetlands and their role in a changing world.

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