

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

Official translation by Charles Akin

Siteref: **6AR004**

1. **Date this sheet was completed/updated:** ~01/08/1995~

2. **Country:** ARGENTINA

3. **Name of wetland:** Reserva Costa Atlántica de Tierra del Fuego

4. **Geographical coordinates:** 53°20'S 68°30'W

5. **Altitude:** sea level

6. **Area:** 28,600 hectares

7. **Overview:**

Located on the northeast shore of Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego, the reserve covers a low coastal area of cliffs and small hills. The steppe landscape is dominated by pasture and xerophilous bush (*Salicornia* spp.), except for a band in the south (roughly 20 km long) where there are patches of stunted *Nothofagus* forest on the high cliffs close to the shore.

Bahía San Sebastián, a wide Pleistocene glacial valley, is the reserve's most important section. Flooded by the sea, this semicircular valley is 50 km long and 40 km wide. The shallow water forms a wide intertidal zone that when exposed at normal low tide extends over about 16,000 hectares of mud. The intertidal strip of sandy soil is wide along the whole length of the reserve. Other important neighbouring areas are the mouth of the Río Grande, close to the city with the same name, Cabo Auricosta and the mouth of the Río Ewan on a loam substrata.

8. **Wetland type:**

shallow sea water - intertidal mud flats - freshwater coastal pools

9. **Ramsar criteria:**

The biological diversity of migratory and indigenous birdlife justifies the inclusion of this wetland.

10. **Map of site included? Please tick yes -or- no**

11. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

Dirección General de Medio Ambiente
Ushuaia
Tierra del Fuego

12. Justification of the criteria selected under point 9, on previous page:

The biological diversity of this wetland, especially the migratory and endemic aquatic birdlife found there, justifies its classification as a protected area.

13. General location: ~no information available~

14. Physical features: ~no information available~

15. Hydrological values: ~no information available~

16. Ecological features: ~no information available~

17. Noteworthy flora: ~no information available~

18. Noteworthy fauna:

Tierra del Fuego is the wintering site of one of the largest concentrations of Neotropical shore birds, 70 per cent of the *Calidris canutus* and *Limosa haemastica* and also 50 per cent of the total population of *Calidris fuscicollis*. Bahía San Sebastián is one of the most important areas for shore birds in Argentina (Morrison) with 32 per cent of the *C. fuscicollis* present on the Atlantic coast, 42 per cent of the total South American population of *L. haemastica* and 13 per cent of the total South American population of *C. canutus*. In addition, the area is important because of the large variety of bird species found there. The area has been designated as an important area for endemic birds by the International Council for Bird Preservation. One of these species, the *Cauquén colorado* (*Chloephaga rubidiceps*), is listed in an appendix of the CITES convention. Only about 300 specimens of this species survive the effects of wintering outside Tierra del Fuego.

At least 21 species of whales frequent these waters for mating, giving birth and feeding in the tidal zone. In the spring, sperm whales and other large whales are found in these waters.

This area is one of the most important areas for birdlife in Argentina because of the concentration of many species of shorebirds. Because of its considerable biodiversity, it is

listed as an area of endemic birds by the Council for Bird Preservation (CBP) and has been included in the South American network of shorebird reserves (WHSRN) at the highest level as a reserve for the hemisphere.

19. **Social and cultural values:** ~no information available~

20. **Land tenure/ownership of:**

Except for the urban area of the city of Río Grande, most of the area is private property held by eight landowners who have signed an agreement with the provincial government to ensure the conservation of the reserve. In 1992, it was declared a provincial nature reserve.

21. **Current land use:** ~no information available~

22. **Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land use and development projects:**

Overall, the reserve is in good ecological condition, but in the very important area of Bahía San Sebastián, the onshore and offshore extraction of petroleum and gas is a potential danger. There is offshore drilling, and one well is being drilled in the intertidal zone at the northern end of the bay where there is the largest concentration of shorebirds. The use of pipelines has led to several minor, until now, spills.

Oil and natural gas are stored along the southern part of this coast, and ships are loaded in the bay about twice a month. The possibility of an oil spill is the most constant and serious threat to the conservation of biodiversity in the reserve.

Along the coast near the city of Río Grande, the reserve is threatened by recreational activities (hikers, motorcycles and four-wheeled vehicles, and the gathering of shellfish) and wandering dogs.

During the past few years, the extraction of sand and gravel from the nearshore area has become an increasingly greater threat to the shore area.

Animal husbandry along the north coast of the island has produced a negative impact on natural pastures, but the greatest impact has been caused by the extraction of petroleum through soil excavation, the creation of roads, the construction of buildings, the laying of pipelines and the digging of sediment basins located along the coast and in the former beach area south of Bahía San Sebastián. This has led to wind and water erosion throughout wide sectors, and the

surface has been contaminated with petroleum.

23. Conservation measures taken:

The first stage (survey and inventory) of the management plan for the reserve is being carried out.

24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

~no information available~

25. Current scientific research and facilities:

Partial studies have been carried out in the area on birds, mammals, fishing and tourism. There are no research facilities in the reserve.

26. Current conservation education: ~no information available~

27. Current recreation and tourism: ~no information available~

28. Jurisdiction: ~no information available~

29. Management authority: ~no information available~

30. Bibliographical references:

- Goodall, R.N. et al. 1991a. A winter evaluation of mammals and birds in the south-western South Atlantic coast between Cabo Vírgines and Cabo San Sebastián. Tierra del Fuego. Total Austral S.A. Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Goodall, R.N. et al. 1991a. A summer evaluation of mammals and birds in the south-western South Atlantic coast between Cabo Vírgines and Cabo San Sebastián. Tierra del Fuego. Total Austral S.A. Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Harrington, B.A. et al. 1980. An investigation of wintering areas of Red Knots (*Calidris canutus*) and Hudsonian Godwits (*Limosa haemastica*) in Argentina. Report to WWF, Washington DC, USA, and Toronto, Canada.
- Morrison, R. et al. 1989. Atlas of Nearctic Shorebirds on the coast of South America. Canadian Wildlife Service. Special Publication. Canada.
- Morrison, R. et al. Shorebirds. Flyways in the New World.
- Schnack, E. 1985. Argentina: The World's Coastline (Bird, E. and Schwartz, M.) Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., New York.