

## Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

1. Date this sheet was completed/updated: 28 January 2001

2. Country: Algeria

3. Name of wetland: Ouled Saïd Oasis

4. Geographical coordinates:

29° 22' - 29° 27' North latitude  
0° 16' - 0° 20' West longitude

5. Altitude: 244 metres (238 to 301 metres)

6. Area: 25,400 hectares

7. Overview:

Ouled Saïd Oasis is a man-made wetland created on the vestiges of a fossilized *oued*. Over time, a decrease in water in this fossilized *oued* has made it necessary to build a *fouggara*, an ingenious traditional system for rationally drawing and distributing water. This water, distributed traditionally through small open canals, is equitably distributed to private gardens where primarily palms are grown in association with several cereals and fruit trees. Ouled Saïd Oasis and its *fouggara* are an example that well illustrates the wise use advocated by the Ramsar Convention. This wetland shows that without man to maintain and protect the *oued* constantly against the sand, it will gradually disappear. Ouled Saïd Oasis is slowly but surely being reclaimed by the sand, and it merits listing in the Montreux Registry. Furthermore, there are archaeological vestiges of old *ksars* constructed using an Arab-Muslim architecture from the fourteenth century and, temporarily, water in the neighbouring *sebkhas* during the winter season. The basins spread throughout the *oued* are important watering points for migrating birds, and there are fish (*barbeau du désert*) in the small irrigation canals (*seguiates*).

8. Wetland type:

Marine/coastal: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, Zk(a)

Continental: L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, Sp, Ss, Tp, Ts, U, Va, Vt, W, Xf, Xp, Y, Zg, Zk(b)

Man-made: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, Zk(c)

9. Ramsar criteria: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

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

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

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

This oasis is a type of wetland that is little or under represented on the Ramsar list of wetlands of international importance. Ouled Saïd Oasis, with its *fougara* and rational use of water, its ancestral social organization and its ancient *ksar* of fourteenth-century architecture, fully justifies its listing because of criterion 1. It is testimony to the perseverance of man against the sand, in the presence encroaching sand and difficult climatic conditions where the tiniest drop of water is important. If elsewhere man has destroyed wetlands, here, he has created a wetland and has perpetuated it long after the body of water that supplied it dried up, through an ingenious system of collection, canals and distribution tanks and a unique community management system. If the Ramsar Convention one day sought an example of the application of wise management, it would find it at this oasis.

13. General location:

the wetland is located in the wilaya of Adrar, daïra of Timimoun, commune of Ouled Saïd, 252 kilometres from the administrative centre of the wilaya (Adrar) and 32 kilometres by road (in a direct line only 8 kilometres) from the town of Timimoun.

14. Physical features:

Soil: slightly sandy-clay to gravelly

Climate: arid Saharan

Microclimate: oasis

Dominant vegetative cover: palm grove and indigenous plant species that fix the sand

Factors affecting the area: a decrease in available water, drought, strong hot seasonal winds, sand storms (from January to April), sirocco (warm winds in the summer)

15. Hydrological values:

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Recharge of the groundwater: aquifers

Management and collection of water: a traditional system represented by *fouggara* and wells with a depth of 5 to 10 metres, joined by underground galleries along 5 to 14 kilometres that transport water to the palm grove by the flow of gravity. Water flows into storage basins, which serve for irrigating gardens and crops among the palm groves.

16. Ecological features:

Dominant plants: date palm, *rettam*, *Acacia raddiana*, tamarisk and henna (*Acacia albida lawsonia*)

Introduced plants: peach, lemon, grape, fig, orange, Barbary fig, cotton

Invasive plants: *Fragmites*, *Imperata*, *Randonia*, *Zygophyllum*

17. Noteworthy flora:

There are two species of economically important palms: *tinnasser* and *h'mira*. Market garden crops and cereals are grown as subsistence crops. The wild flora in the palm groves has not yet been surveyed.

18. Noteworthy fauna:

The fauna that best characterizes the oasis, in addition to transitory bird life, is probably the ungulates, represented by the gazelle and endangered species that are abundant here. It is also a stopover for migratory birds who stay longer during their second stopover (first passage in September–October on the north–south migration and second passage at the end of March–May on the south–north migration with a stopover of 20 to 45 days). However, this phenomenon has still not been studied.

19. Social and cultural values:

Production of dates

Social organisation: F'kih, Chikh Zaouïa, El-mokadem and El-djemâa. The *touiza*, a sort of traditional social solidarity, meets the needs of those who require help from the local community at some point. It was begun for maintenance of the *fouggarates*, harvesting of dates and several types of construction, including Dar Eazouaïa and mosques, plus for aid for poor persons and families. It is also organized when there is a need for a community effort, such as for the *ziarates* (pilgrimage) or religious festivals of the *wali essalah* (saint or marabou).

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There are 24 *wali* in the commune of Ouled Saïd, each *ksar* has at least 1 to 2 *wali* (the equivalent of 1 to 2 *ziarates*). Each *ksar* also has one or more mausoleum (*zaouïa*). The local handicraft is the weaving of handbags using palm fronds, camel-hair burnous for women, *knâa* and red pottery. *Erredim* is a traditional and natural medical treatment for arthralgia, consisting of burying a person up to the neck in the sand dunes that surround the palm groves. The palm groves are a tourist area because of their culinary traditions, the nearby sand dunes and areas of fossilized rocks. A visit to the peat and clay *k'sours* with their distinct architecture and to caves dug into the rock, once inhabited by prehistoric people, offer other attractions for visitors, in addition to the unusual well mechanisms and *fogarra* found here. The region of Ouled Saïd has many sites where fossils (petrified trees and marine fossils) are found. It is also an area for the traditional extraction of untreated natural salt. Other curiosities are the palm groves of Ouled Saïd, Kali, Aghlad, Semouta, Hadj Guelmane, Tindjelet and Ighzer.

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

At the site: Communal land (*orfi*) granted in the presence of witnesses in the presence of the *fkih* for former oasis (*privat*). In the oasis and palm groves, the land (*habous*) belongs to the *zaouïa*, the *wali* and his descendants, as well as anyone wishing to farm there without being able to own the land or sell crops.

#### 21. Current land use:

The oasis of Ouled Saïd is surrounded by the *k'sar* of Aghlad, Hadj Guelmane, Kali, Semouta, Tindjelet and Ighzer. Together they form the oasis of Ouled Saïd. The primary human activity in the oases and palm groves is oasis agriculture. The rest of the land is covered with sand and is subject to desertification. The oases are in fact islands of vegetation in the desert. The total number of inhabitants in the commune is 7,527 inhabitants and their main activity is Saharan agriculture. The main activities are tending the gardens and palm groves and the construction of traditional peat and clay houses within the palm grove. The *sebkha* is an area where water collects from the permanent irrigation of the palm groves. The dune area is invaded by shifting sand and is not covered by palms.

#### Water supply:

For domestic needs: the A.E.P uses a raised reservoir with a capacity of 60 cubic metres supplied by a well north of Ighzer, 14 kilometres from Ouled Saïd. Its capacity is insufficient to meet current demand. Lacking a supply of potable water, water from the *fouggarate* is used for domestic uses, but it is polluted and contains bacteria. There are no industrial activities.

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Irrigation of the palm groves using the *fouggarate*, irrigation of new fields of small oasis from the *fouggarate* and wells. The needs for water are constantly increasing, because of the increase in the number of inhabitants, the creation of new areas of small farms and the expansion of the former palm groves towards areas not invaded by sand. For example, in 1980 an area of 90 hectares in Ouled Saïd was farmed, while in 2000, 90 hectares were cultivated. The lack of maintenance of the *fouggarate* is evident, because of a lack of financial means and to the difficulty of that work.

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

Sand storms, drought, sand encroaching on the oasis, increased demand for water for the inhabitants and for irrigation, abandon of the palm groves, the aging of the *k'sours*, demolition of peat or mortar-less stone houses and lack of capital all adversely affect the site. Lack of regular maintenance of the *fouggarates* (an expensive operation) decreases the flow of water to the oasis.

23. Conservation measures taken:

Currently, like the other oases, Ouled Saïd is not covered by any status giving it protection.

24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

Currently, Ouled Saïd Oasis is not covered by any specific measures.

The following programme proposed by the Conservation des forêts d'Adrar:

- Maintenance and restoration of the *fouggarate*
- Programmes against desertification by fixing the shifting dunes
- Restoration of old *'sours*
- Stability of the human population through the creation of a cooperative for the traditional extraction of salt
- Creation of a conservation and management plan for the area
- Promotion of the planting of fruit trees has already produced good results.

25. Current scientific research and facilities:

There is not yet a research programme.

26. Current conservation education:

There is not yet a programme for promoting awareness and conservation education.

27. Current recreation and tourism:

Although data are not yet available on the precise number of visitors, visitors have been even rarer since 1991.

28. Jurisdiction:

Ouled Saïd Oasis is under the jurisdiction of the Government.

29. Management authority:

Ouled Saïd Oasis is under the authority of the wali of Adrar, represented by the Directions des ressources en eau et de l'Agriculture.

30. References:

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