

2. Lac Tonga

Geographical Coordinates 36°51'N 8°30'E

Area 2,700ha

Location About 60km east of the city of Annaba and 5km west of the border with Tunisia, in the Wilaya (province) of Et-Tarf, north-easternmost Algeria. A few kilometres east of Lac Oubeira Ramsar site (see site account number 1).

Date of Ramsar Designation 4 November 1983.

Other International Designations None.

National Designations Within National Park (Parc national d'El Kala; established by decree 83-462 under the Law on the Protection of the Environment, law number 83-05).

Principal Features The site forms part of the extensive El Kala wetland complex, and includes a shallow, seasonal, freshwater lake, bordered to the north by an extensive sand dune system and linked with the Mediterranean Sea by an artificial channel (Oued Messida). The lake is situated at the centre of a depression surrounded by wooded hills and wet forest composed of *Taxodium distichum*, *Alnus glutinosa*, *Salix pedicilata*, *Populus alba* and *Fraxinus oxyphyla*. The lake supports extensive beds of emergent vegetation, mainly *Scirpus lacustris*, *S. maritimus*, *Phragmites australis* and *Typha* spp. Submerged or floating aquatic plants include *Ranunculus aquatilis* and the invasive exotic *Eichornia crassipes*. Human activities include eel farming, grazing of livestock and seasonal cultivation. The lake is important as a nesting area for several scarce water birds, including *Aythya nyroca*, *Oxyura leucocephala* (globally threatened) and *Porphyrio porphyrio*. Notable mammals include the otter *Lutra lutra*. (1a,1c,2a,2c,3b)

Conservation Issues The 1990 Algerian National Report noted that poaching, eel fishing and the use of the lake's water to irrigate neighbouring land were liable to cause changes in ecological character. In the light of this information and consultations with the Algerian authorities, the Ramsar Monitoring Procedure was implemented at Lac Tonga in November 1990. The Monitoring Procedure Mission which visited the site found that Lac Tonga had dried out completely in the summer of 1990 owing to a combination of drought and water abstraction for irrigation. The mission's detailed report noted that, over the years, there had been several attempts to drain the lake for agriculture; one river which originally ran into Lac Tonga had been diverted and was now separated from the lake by an embankment, before running directly into the sea. The mission suggested that consideration might be given to restoring the natural hydrological functioning of the lake. Eel fishing reportedly led to many water birds and otters (*Lutra lutra*) being drowned in nets and the mission felt that eel fishing should not be permitted in areas of strict protection within the National Park. The report recommends that Lac Tonga be considered as such a zone of strict protection, that surface and groundwater extraction from the lake be strictly controlled, and that conservation and management of the site be incorporated into a Regional Plan for wise use and conservation of land and water resources. Consideration might also be given to augmenting National Park personnel in order to tackle poaching, although this was not thought to be a serious problem at Lac Tonga.