

INFORMATION SHEET ON RAMSAR WETLANDS

1. Country: France
2. Date: 1986
3. Ref: [7FR001]
4. Name and address of compiler:
Edmond Duvivier, DIREN - PACA -
BP No. 120
13 603 - AIX-EN-PROVENCE CEDEX 1
5. Name of wetland: The Camargue
6. Date of Ramsar designation: 1986
7. Geographical coordinates: 43°30'N 04°30'E
8. General location:
Region: Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur; Department:
Bouches-du-Rhône; Town: Arles
9. Area: 85,000 hectares
10. Wetland type: Coastal
11. Altitude:

Average: 1 m; maximum: +4 m; minimum: -1.50 m.
12. Overview:

Delta of the Rhône, with a 36 g/litre (south) to 0 g/litre
(north) salinity gradient. Ponds (20,000 ha) and marsh
(10,000 ha).
13. Physical features:

Muddy plain, sloping gently from north (+ 4 m) to south (0 m), with groundwaters superficially saline in the south (predominantly halophylous vegetation) and saline at depth in the north (forest balance). The area is completely enclosed by high banks. While receiving rainwater, it is mainly fed by water pumped in for agricultural purposes, particularly rice cultivation.

14. Ecological features:

- Coastal dunes extending for 30 km, with 4 species of the genus *Salicornia* covering a 25,000 ha area intersected with permanent and temporary saline ponds.

- Freshwater marsh on the periphery (10,000 ha), with plants of the genera *Phragmites* and *Scirpus*. Grassland with halophylous vegetation. Forest of white poplars on banks of Rhône.

15. Land tenure/ownership of:

(a) site: State -
Department - Commune - Private

(b) surrounding area: Commune - Private

16. Conservation measures taken:

[First line missing ?]

Thirty-two protection categories: integral reserve, listed or classified sites, wildlife refuges, etc.

(See table).

17. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

Countless conservation measures already adopted. Charter of the Parc Naturel Régional (covering the Ramsar site) currently being revised with a view to placing more emphasis on protection.

18. Current land use: principal human activities in:

(a) site:

Reserves, marsh (hunting, rearing), fishing (ponds, sea), farming dominated by rice cultivation (approx. 20,000 ha). Rearing of horse- and cattle-breeds unique to the Camargue.

(b) surroundings/catchment:

Idem

19. Disturbances/threats, including changes in land use and major development projects:

(a) at the site:

- Pollution of the Rhône (annual inflow into the Camargue equal to 400,000,000 m³) and by many plant-health treatments for rice.
- Environmental degradation resulting from the systematic creation of bodies of water to satisfy the demands of hunting (ubiquitous freshwater ponds, which are prevented from drying up in summer).
- Hunting claims the lives of 100,000 to 150,000 ducks (approx.) and geese each winter. There are no numerical or temporal restrictions.
- Tourism. Intensive tourism could be introduced to compensate for the deficiencies of agriculture.

(b) in the surroundings/catchment:

Idem

20. Hydrological and physical values:

- High self-cleansing capacity thanks to the 1,500 ha of saline ponds, which are bathed in sunshine and continually stirred up by the wind. The depth of these ponds does not exceed 1.80 metres.

- Very serious erosion affecting a large stretch of the coastline. Anti-erosion structures are already in place on part of the coastline.

Measures to protect the dunes have also been taken.

21. Social and cultural values:

The area is well-known and its importance is recognized internationally.

Many so-called traditional human activities are still pursued which are totally dependent on the resources of the natural environment.

These activities include salt-exploitation, fish-breeding, intensive stock farming and hunting, etc.

22. Noteworthy fauna:

Several million birds, representing 356 species, frequent the Camargue.

In winter, there are 13 species of ducks, Bewick's swans, sea eagles, peregrine falcons, great white egrets, etc.

In autumn, all species of wading birds are well represented.

In spring/summer, there are 8 species of herons (nest-builders), gull-billed terns, rollers, bee-eaters, ibis,

pratincoles, etc.

23. Noteworthy flora:

- No endemic species, as the age of the Camargue is less than 10,000 years.

- The vegetation is noteworthy because of:

- the large area covered by certain communities, e.g. plants of the genus *Salicornia* (15,000 ha), the species of the dunes (30 km long, uninterrupted by urban developments) and *Zostera nolti* (over 4,000 ha); and

- the development of certain plant communities, notably on the fossil dunes, where 500-year-old junipers are to be found.

24. Current scientific research and facilities:

Fifty research workers and technicians are employed on a full-time basis in the Camargue.

Structures and organizations: CNRS, CEMAGREF, ONF, ONC, Réserve national, Tour du Valat, Universities of Marseille and Montpellier, Conservatoire du littoral, etc.

25. Current conservation education:

- One million visitors a year.

- Sixty km of signposted footpaths, eight information centres, etc.

26. Current recreation and tourism:

- Beaches, used by an estimated 350,000 to 500,000 visitors each year.

- Between April and November, the information centres receive between 200,000 and 250,000 visitors.

- Hunting.

27. Management authority:

Parc Naturel Régional de Camargue
Mas du Pont de Rousty
13200 - Arles

28. Jurisdiction:

See summary sheet or key of the attached map.

29. Bibliographical references:

See bibliography.

30. Reasons for inclusion:

Six criteria

31. Map of site:

See attached map.