

FILE No 3

1. Source:                   Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du premier ministre  
                                  chargé de l'environnement  
                                  Direction de la Protection de la Nature  
                                  14 boulevard du Général Leclerc  
                                  92524 Neuilly sur Seine Cedex

2. Date:                     1 September 1990

3. Name of site:           Etangs de la Petite Woèvre

4. Country:                France

5. Ref:                     **7FR003**

6. Date of Ramsar designation:       08/04/1991

7. Geographical coordinates:        49°02'N   05°48'E

8. Location:

The Etangs de la Petite Woèvre are situated in the department of la Meuse in the north-eastern region of Lorraine. The site is 28 km to the south-west of Metz and 70 km to the south-west of Luxembourg.

The boundaries of the Ramsar site correspond to the limits of the catchment area of the main pond, l'étang de Lachaussée.

IGN maps nos. 3213 and 3313 (1/50 000).

9. Area: 5,300 ha

10. Altitude: 230 to 250 m

11. Overview:

The argillaceous depression of la Woèvre lies on a north-south axis between the Côtes de Meuse and the Côtes de Moselle. The ponds are concentrated in la Petite Woèvre, to the south. They were created in the Middle Ages by monks in order to drain the marshes and breed fish. They are surrounded by woods, pasture and some cultivated land.

In an unspoilt landscape of extensive reed-beds, the vast

étang de Lachaussée (325 ha) and its satellites are a truly exceptional site and provide a refuge for a remarkable range of birds (112 species, including 89 nesting species).

The Ramsar site consists of the following ponds:

- in the commune of Lachaussée:

- \* étang de Lachaussée (Grand Etang) - 325 ha
- \* étang de la Grande Parois - 26 ha
- \* étang de Minuit - 3 ha
- \* étang de Chaudotte - 3 ha

- in the commune of St Benoit en Woëvre:

- \* étang d'Afrique - 17 ha
- \* étang de Vendel - 2 ha
- \* étang d'Anceviennes - 7 ha
- \* étang de Belian - 2.5 ha
- \* étang de Beugné - 18.5 ha
- \* étang Comé - 12.5 ha
- \* étang Picard - 10.6 ha

- in the commune of Vigneulles:

- \* étang de Vigneulles - 22 ha.

The ecological interest of the area derives mainly from the avifauna, as most of the plant species are rather commonplace.

## 12. Physical features:

The climate is of the continental type. The topography of the site is that of a very flat and smooth argillaceous depression, extending to the foot of the Côtes de Meuse. Resting on a substratum of marls and clays, the soils are hydromorphic and acidic. Geological impermeability, gentle slopes and sufficient rainfall have combined to create a series of marshy depressions.

## 13. Biological features:

Although most of the vegetation is of little interest, a few plant species have been listed for their rarity in either the region or the country as a whole (see point 23).

The site supports a remarkable diversity of nest-building birds, the most numerous of which are the coots (*Fulica*), the grebes (*Podiceps*), the herons, the raptors and the crakes (*Porzana*).

The ponds are also a stopover point for many migratory species, particularly those that depend on an aquatic environment. Although most are only transient visitors, some regularly winter there, e.g. *Anas crecca* (green-winged teal), *Anas platyrhynchos* (mallard), *Aythya ferina* (pochard), *Aythya fuligula* (tufted duck), *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* (Bewick's swan), *Ardea cinerea* (grey heron), *Gallinago gallinago* (common snipe), *Pluvialis apricaria* (Eurasian golden plover), *Calidris*

*alpina* (dunlin), *Vanellus vanellus* (northern lapwing), *Grus grus* (common crane), *Circus cyaneus* (hen harrier), etc.

There are six types of habitats: beds of tall reeds (of the genera *Phragmites* and *Typha*), beds of short reeds (of the genera 'glycéraies' = ? and 'caricaies' = ?), stretches of mud and wet meadows, expanses of open water, bushes, and the edges of forests and thickets.

#### 1 - Beds of tall reeds:

These are the domain of the herons, *Botaurus stellaris* (Eurasian bittern), *Ixobrychus minutus* (little bittern), *Ardea purpurea* (purple heron) and *Circus aeruginosus* (marsh harrier).

They are also the habitat of *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (great reed warbler), *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* (reed warbler), *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* (sedge warbler), *Locustella luscinioïdes* (Savi's warbler), *Rallus aquaticus* (water rail) and *Porzana parva* (little crane).

All the above species use the reed-beds for both nesting and feeding, whereas others, e.g. *Fulica atra* (common coot), *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (little grebe) and *Podiceps cristatus* (great crested grebe), use them only for nesting and feed on expanses of open water.

*Natrix natrix* (grass snake) and *Mustela putorius* (polecat) hunt in the reed-beds, but breed elsewhere.

#### 2 - Beds of short reeds:

These are used for nesting by *Anas platyrhynchos* (mallard), *Aythya ferina* (pochard), *Aythya fuligula* (tufted duck), *Porzana porzana* (spotted crane), *Porzana pusilla* (Baillon's crane) and *Fulica atra* (common coot).

*Ardea cinerea* (grey heron) and *Anas platyrhynchos* come to feed.

#### 3 - Stretches of mud and wet meadows:

These are the feeding grounds of species such as the waders (*Tringa*, *Actitis* - sandpiper; *Gallinago* - snipe, etc.). They also provide roosts for *Anas* and *Aythya* (duck) and *Phalacrocorax* (cormorant).

They are used for nesting by *Motacilla flava* (blue-headed wagtail) and *Vanellus vanellus* (northern lapwing) and are frequented by geese in winter.

#### 4 - Expanses of open water:

It is here that the piscivorous species *Podiceps cristatus* (great crested grebe), *Phalacrocorax carbo* (great cormorant), etc. feed, along with *Aythya fuligula* (tufted duck) and *Fulica atra* (common coot).

These expanses of open water are of much importance to birds in winter.

## 5 - Bushes:

These provide most of the passerines with food and are favoured by them as nesting sites. Noteworthy species include *Hippolais icterina* (icterine warbler), *Luscinia megarhynchos* (nightingale) and *Locustella naevia* (grasshopper warbler).

There are large populations of *Emberiza schoeniclus* (reed bunting) and *Acrocephalus schoenbaenus* (sedge warbler).

The bushes are also a refuge for *Felis silvestris* (wild cat), *Vulpes vulpes* (fox), *Mustela putorius* (polecat) and *Sus scrofa* (wild boar).

## 6 - Edges of forests and thickets:

While the passerines are found in abundance in these wooded areas, they are of particular importance as nesting sites for raptors such as *Milvus migrans* (black kite), *Milvus milvus* (= red kite ?) and *Buteo buteo* (common buzzard).

### 14. Land tenure/ownership of:

Private and public property.

### 15. Conservation measures taken:

- The Vieux Moulin estate (480 ha, including 360 ha of lakes and reed-beds), which incorporates the Grand étang de Lachaussée, the étangs Picard and Comé, riparian grassland, agricultural land and forests, is covered by an ecological management agreement between the owner (Association des Paralysés de France) and the Conservatoire des Sites Lorrains. As the tenant, the Conservatoire has control over hunting and is thus able to ensure peace and safety for the avifauna.
- The site was entered in the inventory of picturesque sites on 18 January 1982.
- The étangs de Lachaussée, de Chaudotte, de Beugné and de Vigneulles are listed in the Zones Naturelles d'Intérêt Ecologique Floristique et Faunistique (ZNIEFF) inventory.
- The Parc Naturel Régional de Lorraine, which was created in 1974 and has an area of 205,000 ha, includes la Petite Woëvre (management consultant, 'animation' [= publicity], scientific studies, etc.).

### 16. Conservation measures proposed:

The studies undertaken by the Conservatoire des Sites Lorrains propose a number of management schemes for the Vieux Moulin estate and the étang de Chaudotte (see point 29), e.g.:

- clearing weeds and removing silt, while preserving the beds of tall reeds;

- late mowing of the wet meadows or using them for grazing on a large scale;
- creating eyries for *Pandion haliaetus* (osprey);
- creating mud-holes; and
- refilling the Neuf Etang (situated near the étang de Chaudotte and dry for more than ten years).

A proposal to convert the étang de Lachaussée into a nature reserve has also been drafted.

17. Land use:

- fish-breeding: 40 tonnes of fish taken in 1989; main species bred: *Cyprinus carpio* (carp), *Tinca tinca* (tench) and *Esox lucius* (pike).

Some twenty people are engaged in this activity on the Vieux Moulin estate. They also run a poultry farm.

- agriculture: mixed farming/livestock grazing and growing of cereals in a drained farming area.
- amateur hunting and fishing on the satellite lakes of the Vieux Moulin estate and in the surrounding forests.

18. Changes in land use and development projects:

No changes in land use.

Most visitors to the site are specialists (ornithologists) and the development of tourism is thought to be acceptable if done in moderation.

The ecological appeal of the site (exploration and observation of the natural environment) and the culinary appeal of the area (sampling of the quality gastronomic produce of the Vieux Moulin estate) could be used as a basis for such development.

19. Threats and problems:

Constant and increasing drainage in the region is resulting in the disappearance of wet meadows and of species once dependent on the site for their habitat. It is also facilitating the leaching of fertilisers and pesticides, thus impairing the quality of the water.

20. Hydrological and biophysical values:

The hydrological and biophysical value of the site resides in the potential of the pond ecosystem, as evidenced by the growth of fish-breeding. Its ecological value stems from its being a refuge for nesting, wintering and migrating birds.

21. Social and cultural values:

- aesthetic value (magnificent landscape)

- educational function (observation of nature)
- scientific interest
- social and recreational function (fishing, hunting, 'green' tourism)
- historical value (environment created by monks in the Middle Ages)

22. Noteworthy fauna:

- *Circus aeruginosus* \* (marsh harrier)
- *Circus cyaneus* \* (hen harrier)
- *Botaurus stellaris* \* (Eurasian bittern)
- *Ixobrychus minutus* \* (little bittern)
- *Ardea purpurea* \* (purple heron)
- *Porzana parva* \* (little crake)
- *Porzana porzana* \* (spotted crake)
- *Porzana pusilla* \* (Baillon's crake)
- *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* \* (Bewick's swan)
- *Pluvialis apricaria* \* (Eurasian golden plover)
- *Grus grus* \* (common crane)
- *Phalacrocorax carbo* \* (great cormorant)
- *Milvus migrans* \* (black kite)
- *Milvus milvus* \* (= red kite ?)
- *Accipiter gentilis* \* (goshawk)
- *Falco columbarius* \* (merlin)
- *Upupa epops* (hoopoe)
- *Sylvia communis* (whitethroat)
- *Chlidonias niger* \* (black tern)

\* Species requiring special protection pursuant to EEC Directive 79/409

Bats: 7 species, including *Myotis brandti* (Brandt's vespertilio), which is very rare in France.

23. Noteworthy flora:

- *Ranunculus lingua*
- *Senecio paludosus*
- *Carex serotina*
- *Leersia oryzoides*
- *Cyperus fuscus*

24. Scientific research and facilities:

- Observation tower in the Vieux Moulin estate
- Scientific monitoring by the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux, LPO Lorraine (IWRB relay station)

25. Educational value:

As far as the exploration, awareness and protection of nature are concerned, the site fulfils an educational function which could be developed in parallel with the development of tourism (see point 18).

26. Recreation and tourism:

- Fishing, hunting, ornithology
- See point 18.

27. Management authority:

- Communes, landowners (Association des Paralysés de France), farmers
- Conservatoire des Sites Lorrains, Parc Naturel Régional de Lorraine, LPO Lorraine
- Hunting associations

28. Jurisdiction:

- Conseil régional de la région Lorraine, Conseil général de la Meuse
- Government agencies: DRAE, DDAF, DDE, DDASS

29. Bibliography:

- CEMAGREF 1986 - Développement des productions aquacoles en Petite Woëvre, étude du milieu (= development of aquafarming in Petite Woëvre, study of the environment) - 138 pp.
- COSTA P. 1981 - Hydroécologie et utilisation des grands étangs de la Woëvre (= Hydroecology and use of the large ponds of La Woëvre) - University of Nancy II
- CONSERVATOIRE DES SITES LORRAINS 1988 - Etude écologique des étangs de Lachaussée, Domaine du Vieux Moulin, étang de Chaudotte et annexes, rapport de synthèse faune-flore (= Ecological study on the Lachaussée ponds, the Vieux Moulin estate, the Chaudotte pond and surroundings, fauna-flora summary report) - 54 pp.
- ECOLOR/MINISTERE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT 1985 - Les zones humides de Lorraine (= The wetlands of Lorraine) - 36 pp.
- BEGUIN D., RABAU F., DUVAL T. 1982 - Etude des zones humides de la commune de Lachaussée (= Study on the wetlands of the commune of Lachaussée) - ECOLOR/DRAE Lorraine
- GUEVAL S. 1989 - Impacts du développement piscicole sur les étangs de Lachaussée, Mesures compensatoires et Propositions d'aménagement (= Effects of the development of fish-breeding on the Lachaussée ponds, compensatory measures and proposed changes) - CSL/University of Paris 7/DRAE Lorraine

30. Inclusion criteria:

La Petite Woëvre can be included in the list of wetlands of international importance inasmuch as it meets the following criteria, which were approved at the Third Conference of the Contracting Parties:

1a: It is a particularly good representative example of a European continental wetland plain.

2a. & 2c.: It supports 89 species of nest-building birds and is of special value as the habitat of animals at a critical stage of their biological cycle (stopover point for migratory birds, wintering ground).

3b: It supports a substantial number of species protected under EEC Directive 79/409.

31. Ecological changes linked to human intervention:

No real changes

32. Maps:

Attached