



Ramsar Information Sheet

Published on 1 December 2025

Saudi Arabia

Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve



Designation date	19 October 2025
Site number	2582
Coordinates	16°49'03"N 42°00'38"E
Area	10 609,00 ha

Color codes

Fields back-shaded in light blue relate to data and information required only for RIS updates.

Note that some fields concerning aspects of Part 3, the Ecological Character Description of the RIS (tinted in purple), are not expected to be completed as part of a standard RIS, but are included for completeness so as to provide the requested consistency between the RIS and the format of a 'full' Ecological Character Description, as adopted in Resolution X.15 (2008). If a Contracting Party does have information available that is relevant to these fields (for example from a national format Ecological Character Description) it may, if it wishes to, include information in these additional fields.

1 - Summary

Summary

The Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve makes up one of Saudi Arabia's prime protected areas. It was declared in 1996 by a Royal Decree and has ever since served as an important mixed nature protection site comprising of characteristic landscape and seascape. It was approved in 2021 under UNESCO's Man & Biosphere Programme. It is a Red Sea coral archipelago about 40 km offshore, comprising more than 170 islands, islets and rocky outcrops with a total area of 5,787 km² (5,077 km² marine & 710 km² terrestrial) managed by the Saudi National Center for Wildlife - NCW. The largest island, Farasan Kabir (c.39,500 ha; 120 km long), is covered inland with Acacia–Commiphora bushland mixed with Ziziphus and Salvadora, as well as Euphorbia thickets and dense, high Asparagus bushland. Coastal habitats include extensive mangroves dominated by Avicennia marina and large stands of Rhizophora mucronata—the biggest in the Saudi Red Sea—alongside salt-tolerant plants such as Suaeda monoica, Limonium axillare and Zygophyllum spp. The archipelago was formed by uplift of a salt dome, with coral reefs about 7,000 years old. Marine biotopes include coral- and algae-dominated fringing and patch reefs, coral–algal reefs, platform reefs, shoals, mudflats, seagrass meadows and subtidal sand expanses. The islands support important seabird colonies: White-cheeked Tern Sterna repressa, Bridled Tern Sterna anaethetus, Brown Noddy Anous stolidus, Brown Booby Sula leucogaster, Caspian Tern Sterna caspia, Lesser Crested Tern Sterna bengalensis and Saunders' Little Tern Sterna saundersi. Farasan islands are the only confirmed Red Sea breeding site for Crab Plover Dromas ardeola, while Rhizophora mangroves host perhaps the largest colony of Pink-backed Pelican Pelecanus rufescens. Other breeding waterbirds include Western Reef Egret Egretta gularis, Goliath Heron Ardea goliath, Spoonbill Platalea leucorodia and Sooty Gull Larus hemprichii, Caspian Tern Sterna caspia, Lesser Crested Tern S. bengalensis and Saunders' Little Tern S. saundersi. Raptors such as Osprey Pandion haliaetus and the globally threatened Sooty Falcon Falco concolor also breed, and large numbers of shorebirds, notably Lesser Sand Plover Charadrius mongolus and Ruddy Turnstone Arenaria interpres, are present. Some islands are inhabited, with small communities and Coast Guard stations, making Farasan a unique mosaic of terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems vital for biodiversity conservation in the southern Red Sea.

2 - Data & location

2.1 - Formal data

2.1.1 - Name and address of the compiler of this RIS

Responsible compiler

Institution/agency	The National Center for Wildlife
Postal address	Saudi Arabia, P.O.Box: 4508, Riyadh, 12411

National Ramsar Administrative Authority

Institution/agency	The National Center for Wildlife
Postal address	PP2R+WJH, Makkah Al Mukarramah Br Rd, King Abdul Aziz, Riyadh 12411

2.1.2 - Period of collection of data and information used to compile the RIS

From year	2021
To year	2025

2.1.3 - Name of the Ramsar Site

Official name (in English, French or Spanish)	Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve
Unofficial name (optional)	Farasan Islands Reserve

2.2 - Site location

2.2.1 - Defining the Site boundaries

b) Digital map/image

<2 file(s) uploaded>

Former maps	0
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Boundaries description

The boundaries of the Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve follow the legally designated borders established by the National Center for Wildlife. The Ramsar site covers an area of 106 square km within the reserve. The boundaries include several coastal habitats (mangroves, coastal lagoons, salt marshes, and sandy beaches) and adjacent marine habitats (coral reefs, seagrass beds, and shallow waters) essential for the ecological functionality of the site.

The delineation of the Ramsar site is consistent with the official protected area map provided by the National Center for Wildlife, and it is fully contained within the Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve designated by UNESCO. The Site is located 9 km NW(N 16°45'19.75", E 42° 2'29.29") of the main urban area of the island, extending NW to Saqid area (N 16°50'35.03, E 41°55'27.17"). The site extends East 7 km off shore, covering a large costal lagoon (N 16°52'55.86", E 41°59'19.68"), reaching a shallow costal beach in the SE(N 16°47'7.36", E 42° 6'29.11").

2.2.2 - General location

a) In which large administrative region does the site lie?	Jazan Region
b) What is the nearest town or population centre?	Farsan Al Kabir

2.2.3 - For wetlands on national boundaries only

- a) Does the wetland extend onto the territory of one or more other countries? Yes ☐ No ☒
- b) Is the site adjacent to another designated Ramsar Site on the territory of another Contracting Party? Yes ☐ No ☒

2.2.4 - Area of the Site

Official area, in hectares (ha):	10609
Area, in hectares (ha) as calculated from GIS boundaries	10609.87

2.2.5 - Biogeography

Biogeographic regions

Regionalisation scheme(s)	Biogeographic region
Marine Ecoregions of the World (MEOW)	Southwest Arabian coastal xeric shrublands

Other biogeographic regionalisation scheme

The Farasan Islands Protected Area is comprised of the following ecosystems as identified by Llewellyn (2023) - National Ecosystem Classification:

- Southern Red Sea Shoreline
- Southern Tihamah Coastal Plain
- Red Sea Mangroves
- Southern Red Sea
- Pelagic Sea

The proposed Ramsar site covers all these ecosystems.

3 - Why is the Site important?

3.1 - Ramsar Criteria and their justification

☒ Criterion 1: Representative, rare or unique natural or near-natural wetland types

Hydrological services provided

The Ramsar site as part of the reserve provides key hydrological services that sustain the coastal and marine ecosystems. The mangrove forests contribute to water filtration and sediment retention, which improves water quality and reduces coastal erosion. The wetlands also enhance groundwater recharge and act as a buffer against storm surges and tidal fluctuations, thereby protecting both biodiversity and nearby human settlements. Furthermore, the interconnected system of mangroves, seagrass beds, and coral reefs supports nutrient cycling and maintains the ecological balance of the Red Sea.

Other ecosystem services provided

The Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve provides a wide range of ecosystem services that benefit both biodiversity and local communities. The mangrove forests, seagrass beds, and coral reefs create critical habitats for fish and invertebrates, supporting local fisheries and food security. These ecosystems also play an essential role in carbon sequestration, contributing to climate change mitigation. In addition, the scenic landscapes and rich biodiversity attract ecotourism and educational activities, offering cultural and recreational services that benefit local livelihoods and promote awareness about conservation.

The site is known to be important for fish breeding and an important breeding, feeding and stopover site for birds. Seagrass systems are known to help stabilize the shoreline. Similarly, the Al Qandal mangrove ecosystem that is supported by the wetland prevents coastal erosion and controls floods, thus preserving valuable terrestrial and coastal habitats. Besides, mangrove ecosystems can reduce the economic damage inflicted by storms on coastal communities and their property. On the other hand, marine vegetated habitats (seagrasses, tidal marshes, macroalgae, and mangroves) and associated terrestrial vegetation play a significant role in carbon sequestration, thus reducing the greenhouse effect and mitigating the effects of climate change.

The Farasan Islands are of high cultural and historical importance, hosting archaeological remains and traditional livelihoods closely tied to the sea. The site also serves as an important research and monitoring area for marine biodiversity, providing valuable scientific knowledge that contributes to conservation strategies at national and regional levels. Furthermore, its designation under Ramsar strengthens international cooperation in the Red Sea region and supports Saudi Arabia's commitment to global biodiversity conservation goals.

Other reasons

The site host mixture of exceptional diversity of coastal and marine wetland types that are representative, rare, and unique within the Red Sea region. The site encompasses extensive coral reefs, shallow marine water, mangrove stands and intertidal mudflats, forming a mosaic of habitats that are both ecologically intact and a highly productive seascape that maintains trophic levels.

Mangrove stands at the site are the largest and healthiest stands along the Saudi Red Sea coast. They are dominated by *Avicennia marina* along sheltered. These swamps harbor algal mats, crabs, shrimps, juvenile fish, and support large nesting birds. *Avicennia* leaves are grazed by gazelles, while *Rhizophora* provides nesting for spoonbills, herons and pelicans. Dunes and sand flats form extensive low-lying coastal habitats that are periodically submerged at high tide and exposed at low tide, creating productive grounds for birds, fish and invertebrates, and serving as key seabird breeding areas.

Shallow marine waters of the site are highly productive and undisturbed, serving as vital feeding grounds migratory and resident seabirds. Tidal flats are regionally rare and in addition to shallow waters, they support rich seagrass meadows and algae, which supply food, shelter and nutrient cycling critical for marine organisms.

Coral reefs within the Ramsar site are among the most pristine in the Red Sea, with high coral cover, structural complexity, and resilience, making them globally unique in terms of biodiversity and ecosystem function.

These wetland types are amongst the best-preserved wetland coastal ecosystems along the Red Sea coasts, contributing to making the site a rare and highly representative of this biogeographic region. Their conservation, pristine nature, ecological functions, make the Ramsar site a unique representative of red Sea coastal ecosystem amd of outstanding conservation value.

☒ Criterion 2 : Rare species and threatened ecological communities

Optional text box to provide further information

The Ramsar site supports rare and unique ecological communities of the Red Sea. The site hosts extensive mangrove forests (*Avicennia marina*), seagrass meadows, and coral reefs.

These mangrove stands harbor algal mats, crabs, shrimps, juvenile fish, and support large nesting birds. *Avicennia* leaves are grazed by gazelles, while *Rhizophora* provides nesting for spoonbills, herons and pelicans. Dunes and sand flats form extensive low-lying coastal habitats that are periodically submerged at high tide and exposed at low tide, creating productive grounds for birds, fish and invertebrates, and serving as key seabird breeding areas.

These forests provide critical ecosystem services, including shoreline stabilization, carbon sequestration, and nutrient cycling.

The grass meadows are of exceptional ecological importance in the Red Sea. They support globally threatened species such as the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), which rely on these meadows for feeding. The meadows also enhance water clarity, stabilize sediments, and support high biodiversity of invertebrates and fish.

The coral reefs of the site are among the most pristine and structurally complex in the Red Sea. They support exceptionally high coral cover and species diversity, providing habitat for a wide range of reef-associated fish and invertebrates, including several species of conservation concern. These reefs function as critical spawning and feeding grounds, contributing to the productivity of surrounding ecosystems such as mangroves and seagrass beds.

these complex intact wetlan system is an important breeding and feeding ground for the Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*), and Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). The beaches provide critical nesting sites for the Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and the Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), while the surrounding waters support populations of Dugong (*Dugong dugon*). These elements together demonstrate the site's importance under Criterion 2.

☒ Criterion 3 : Biological diversity

Justification

Dense shrub habitats occur in the site, dominated by *Acacia ehrenbergiana* and *Salvadora persica*. Coastal halophyte shrublands occur on silty sands of the site and are characterized by salt-tolerant pioneer species such as *Arthrocnemum macrostachyum*, *Limonium axillare* and *Zygophyllum* spp. Tidal flats and shallow waters support rich seagrass meadows and algae, which supply food, shelter and nutrient cycling critical for marine organisms.

Mangroves are dominated by *Avicennia marina* along sheltered coasts and rare large stands of *Rhizophora mucronata*, unusual in the Red Sea. These swamps harbor algal mats, crabs, shrimps, juvenile fish, and support large nesting birds.

Marine biodiversity is remarkable, with at least 49 species of reef-building corals and 11 soft corals, plus important reef-associated invertebrates such as sponges, ascidians, echinoderms, crustaceans, lobsters and crabs. Over 231 species of fish are recorded, including unique seasonal aggregations of the parrotfish *Hipposcarus harid*. Globally threatened turtles nest on the islands, including the Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and the Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). Cetaceans frequent the waters, including Bryde's whale (*Balaenoptera edeni*), Omura's whale (*B. omurai*), Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), Dwarf sperm whale (*Kogia sima*), Killer whale (*Orcinus orca*), False killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*), Short-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), and several dolphin species.

On land, the endemic Farasani gazelle (*Gazella arabica farasani*) is unique to the islands, alongside several bats, including the rare *Asellia patrizii*. Reptiles include the endemic Sarso Island racer, while amphibians are represented by the Arabian toad (*Sclerophrys arabica*).

Avifauna is of outstanding importance, with at least 125 bird species recorded, making the reserve an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA). The islands support Saudi Arabia's only breeding colony of the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) and possibly the largest Red Sea colony of Pink-backed pelican (*Pelecanus rufescens*). Internationally significant populations of seabirds include Common noddy (*Anous stolidus*), Crab plover (*Dromas ardeola*), and Sooty falcon (*Falco concolor*). Large numbers of terns also breed, including *Sterna repressa*, *Sterna anaethetus*, *Sterna caspia*, *Sterna bengalensis* and *Sterna saundersi*. Together, these diverse ecosystems and species highlight the Farasan Islands as a biodiversity hotspot of the southern Red Sea, crucial for conservation

☒ Criterion 6 : >1% waterbird population

Optional text box to provide further information

Juzur Farasan Biosphere Reserve qualifies under Criterion 6 suggesting that the site regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbirds. Available evidence from mid-winter population counts for the years 2024 and 2025 revealed that the site hosts several populations of waterbirds that are well above the threshold. For instance, a total of 2,256 *Larus genei* were recorded in the site representing over 1% of a biogeographic population for the species (West South-west & South Asia).

Similarly, the survey also recorded a total of 150 *Charadrius leschenaultii* representing larger threshold of the Biogeographic (Columbinus, Turkey & SW Asia/E. Mediterranean & Red Sea) population for the species (this may also overlaps with the *scythicus*, Caspian & SW Asia/Arabia & NE Africa).

3.2 - Plant species whose presence relates to the international importance of the site

Phylum	Scientific name	Criterion 2	Criterion 3	Criterion 4	IUCN Red List	CITES Appendix I	Other status	Justification
Plantae								
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	Avicennia marina	☐	☒	☐	LC	☐		Mangroves are dominated by Avicennia marina along sheltered coasts
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	Rhizophora mucronata	☐	☒	☐	LC	☐		

3.3 - Animal species whose presence relates to the international importance of the site

Phylum	Scientific name	Species qualifies under criterion				Species contributes under criterion				Pop. Size	Period of pop. Est.	% occurrence 1)	IUCN Red List	CITES Appendix I	CMS Appendix I	Other Status	Justification
		2	4	6	9	3	5	7	8								
Others																	
CHORDATA/ REPTILIA	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐				EN	☒	☒		
CHORDATA/ REPTILIA	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐				CR	☒	☒		The site provides suitable breeding, mating, and nesting sites (sandy shores).
Birds																	
CHORDATA/ AVES	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	2256	2024	1.5		☐	☐		The mid-winter counts (2024–2025) confirm that the Farasan Islands regularly support more than 1.5% of the biogeographic population of <i>Larus genei</i> , fulfilling Criterion 6.
CHORDATA/ AVES	<i>Falco concolor</i>	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐				VU	☐	☐		The Farasan Islands provide important breeding and foraging grounds for the Sooty Falcon (<i>Falco concolor</i>), a migratory raptor listed as (VU) on the IUCN Red List. The site's coastal habitats and offshore islands serve as critical nesting areas that contribute to the global conservation of the species and qualify the site under Criterion 2
CHORDATA/ AVES	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐				EN	☐	☒		The Farasan Islands support populations of the Egyptian Vulture (<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>), a globally Endangered raptor. The site provides important foraging habitats and safe roosting areas, contributing to the survival of this threatened species along its migratory flyway. Its presence qualifies the site under Criterion 2

1) Percentage of the total biogeographic population at the site

The Farasan Islands were recommended by Derek Scott (A Directory of Wetlands in the Middle East, 1995), who considered this to be the one wetland site in the Kingdom that qualified for listing as a Ramsar site under almost all qualification criteria. The proposed site include a range of coastal wetlands such as mangroves, saltmarshes (Halophyte Shrub), seagrass beds, and coral reefs.

The Coastal Halophyte Shrub: Silty sands line with Belts of salt-tolerant pioneer xerophytes such as *Arthrocnemum macrostachyum*, *Limonium axillare* and *Zygophyllum* species. These long-rooted species stabilize and enrich the soil and provide food and nesting sites for shorebirds. These species have adapted to saline soils and strong winds, providing stabilization for coastal dunes and contributing to the resilience of the coastline against erosion. The tidal flora along the tidal flats and shallow waters surrounding the islands, various species of seagrasses and algae flourish. These underwater plants provide food and shelter for marine organisms, contribute to nutrient cycling, and help maintain water quality in the surrounding marine environment.

The Mangroves: *Avicennia marina* lines many sheltered coasts. There are also large stands of *Rhizophora mucronata* which is rare in the Red Sea. These mangrove swamps are carpeted with blue-green algal mats and are a fertile refuge for marine invertebrates, young fish, shrimp and large nesting birds, and *Avicennia* leaves are eaten by gazelles. The Mangrove swamps are very productive, where rich flora of tiny algae and planktonic larvae, crabs, snails, young shrimps, and fish live here. Larger animals find refuge here are the mudskipper fish, spoonbills, herons, and pelicans nest in the *Rhizophora*.

At least 231 species of fish have been recorded in the Farasan Archipelago. The islands are known to host a unique seasonal aggregation of the parrotfish *Hipposcarus harid*. The globally threatened Green and Hawksbill turtle are also prevalent and regularly nest in the reserve.

Farasani gazelles *Gazella arabica farasani* is endemic to the islands. Several species of bats are recorded including one of the most rare bats in the word, *Asellia patrizii*.

The reserve supports the only breeding colony of Egyptian vultures in Saudi Arabia. The islands' population of pink-backed pelican is probably the largest breeding colony of the species in the entire Red Sea and majority of the population occur within the proposed Ramsar site. A total of 145 bird species have been recorded. It is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA), due to it having globally threatened species; globally and regionally large congregations; species with unfavorable conservation status in the Arabian Peninsula. Internationally significant populations of seabirds include pink-backed pelicans *Pelecanus rufescens*, common noddly *Anous stolidus*, and crab plover *Dromas ardeola*.

3.4 - Ecological communities whose presence relates to the international importance of the site

Name of ecological community	Community qualifies under Criterion 2?	Description	Justification
Mangrove forests (<i>Avicennia marina</i> and <i>Rhizophora mucronata</i>)	☒	Remnant stands of mangrove forest providing essential habitat and nursery grounds for birds, fish, and crustaceans.	These keystone species play a critical role in stabilizing the coastline, supporting biodiversity, and maintaining ecosystem functions.
<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	☒	The beaches provide critical nesting sites for the Hawksbill Turtle (<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>)	They play a critical role in maintaining ecosystem functions.
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	☒	The beaches provide critical nesting sites for the Green Turtle (<i>Chelonia mydas</i>)	They play a critical role in maintaining ecosystem functions.

[Optional text box to provide further information](#)

The site harbors important ecological communities including mangrove forests (*Avicennia marina* and *Rhizophora mucronata*), seagrass meadows, and macroalgal beds. These communities are keystone habitats that support a wide range of species such as fish, crustaceans, sea turtles, and waterbirds. They provide critical ecosystem services including coastal protection, nursery grounds, feeding areas, and enhancement of biodiversity at genetic, species, and ecosystem levels. Their presence highlights the international importance of the site under Criterion 2.

4 - What is the Site like? (Ecological character description)

4.1 - Ecological character

The Ramsar site within Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve is an important wetland area comprising a wide spectrum of habitats that contribute to its ecological significance and natural beauty. Arid plains are largely ancient reef pavement, barren except after rains when annuals such as *Justicia flava* appear. Dominant shrubs include drought-resistant *Capparis sinaica* and *Indigofera oblongifolia*, with *Abutilon pannosum* on silt, while herbs such as *Zygophyllum simplex*, *Blepharis ciliaris* and the sedge *Cyperus jemenicus* are widespread in sandy patches. Occasional trees include *Hyphaene thebaica*, *Salvadora persica* and *Acacia ehrenbergiana*. These plants are highly adapted to arid conditions, conserving water and stabilizing soils.

Dense shrub habitats occur in silt pans, valleys and pockets of good soil within rocky outcrops, dominated by *Acacia ehrenbergiana* and large *Salvadora persica*. Coastal halophyte shrublands occur on silty sands and are characterized by salt-tolerant pioneer species such as *Arthrocnemum macrostachyum*, *Limonium axillare* and *Zygophyllum* spp., which stabilize dunes, enrich soil, and provide nesting sites for shorebirds. Tidal flats and shallow waters support rich seagrass meadows and algae, which supply food, shelter and nutrient cycling critical for marine organisms.

Mangroves are dominated by *Avicennia marina* along sheltered coasts and rare large stands of *Rhizophora mucronata*, unusual in the Red Sea. These swamps harbor algal mats, crabs, shrimps, juvenile fish, and support large nesting birds. *Avicennia* leaves are grazed by gazelles, while *Rhizophora* provides nesting for spoonbills, herons and pelicans. Dunes and sand flats form extensive low-lying coastal habitats that are periodically submerged at high tide and exposed at low tide, creating productive grounds for birds, fish and invertebrates, and serving as key seabird breeding areas.

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4.2 - What wetland type(s) are in the site?

Marine or coastal wetlands

Wetland types (code and name)	Local name	Ranking of extent (1: greatest - 4: least)	Area (ha) of wetland type	Justification of Criterion 1
A: Permanent shallow marine waters	shallow marine water	3	6280	Representative
C: Coral reefs	Coral reef	4	80	Unique
H: Intertidal marshes	Marshes	4	300	Rare
I: Intertidal forested wetlands	Mangroves	2	3000	Unique
J: Coastal brackish / saline lagoons	Lagoon	3	1000	Representative

4.3 - Biological components

4.3.1 - Plant species

Other noteworthy plant species

Phylum	Scientific name	Position in range / endemism / other
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	<i>Abutilon pannosum</i>	native
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	<i>Allenrolfea occidentalis</i>	native
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	<i>Blepharis ciliaris</i>	native
TRACHEOPHYTA/LILIOPSIDA	<i>Cyperus jemenicus</i>	native
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	<i>Indigofera schimperi</i>	native
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	<i>Justicia kanal</i>	native
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	<i>Limonium axillare</i>	native
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	<i>Salvadora persica</i>	native

Invasive alien plant species

Phylum	Scientific name	Impacts
TRACHEOPHYTA/MAGNOLIOPSIDA	<i>Prosopis juliflora</i>	Actual (major impacts)

Optional text box to provide further information

The Farasan Islands support a wide diversity of plant communities that play a critical role in maintaining the ecological integrity of the reserve. The most important species include the mangroves *Avicennia marina* (grey mangrove) and *Rhizophora mucronata* (Asiatic mangrove), which act as keystone species. They stabilize shorelines, prevent erosion, provide nursery grounds for fish and invertebrates, and offer feeding and nesting habitats for a wide range of bird species. These mangroves also contribute significantly to carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation. Coastal halophyte shrublands dominated by *Arthrocnemum macrostachyum*, *Limonium axillare*, and *Zygophyllum* spp. stabilize sandy soils and enrich coastal dunes, supporting shorebirds and providing resilience against strong winds and salinity. Inland and dense shrub habitats include *Acacia ehrenbergiana* and *Salvadora persica*, which are important forage species, alongside *Phoenix dactylifera* and *Ficus populifolia* in localized areas. These plant communities support biodiversity by providing cover, shade, and food resources for terrestrial fauna. The invasive alien plant *Prosopis juliflora* has spread in the last two decades, particularly in valley bottoms and silt pans, where it competes with native vegetation, alters soil properties, and threatens ecosystem balance. Its presence is considered to have major ecological impacts, making it a priority for management. Overall, the vegetation of the Farasan Islands reflects a unique mosaic of coastal and arid habitats that underpin the ecological character of the Ramsar site, enhance connectivity between marine and terrestrial ecosystems, and ensure long-term sustainability of biodiversity.

4.3.2 - Animal species

Other noteworthy animal species

Phylum	Scientific name	Pop. size	Period of pop. est.	%occurrence	Position in range /endemism/other
CHORDATA/MAMMALIA	<i>Asellia patrizii</i>	100	2024		Northern most extension within the range
CHORDATA/AVES	<i>Dromas ardeola</i>	426	2024		Native range
CHORDATA/MAMMALIA	<i>Gazella arabica</i>	1200	2024	10	Endemic
CHORDATA/AVES	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>	361	2024		Native range

Invasive alien animal species

Phylum	Scientific name	Impacts
CHORDATA/AVES	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	Actual (minor impacts)

Optional text box to provide further information

The Farasan Islands host a rich diversity of animal species that underline the ecological importance of the reserve. The marine environment supports globally threatened sea turtles, including the Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and the Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), which regularly nest on sandy beaches. Several whale and dolphin species occur in surrounding waters, such as Bryde’s Whale (*Balaenoptera edeni*), Omura’s Whale (*Balaenoptera omurai*), Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), Dwarf Sperm Whale (*Kogia sima*), Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*), False Killer Whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*), Short-finned Pilot Whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), and multiple dolphin species. The islands are internationally important for birds, with 145 species recorded, including the only breeding colony of Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) in Saudi Arabia and what is likely the largest Red Sea breeding colony of Pink-backed Pelican (*Pelecanus rufescens*). Other significant breeding seabirds include the Common Noddy (*Anous stolidus*), Crab Plover (*Dromas ardeola*), and Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*). Reef ecosystems provide habitat for at least 49 species of reef-building corals and 11 species of soft corals, supporting sponges, echinoderms, crustaceans, lobsters, and crabs. Over 231 fish species are recorded, including a unique seasonal aggregation of the parrotfish (*Hippocarcus harid*). Among reptiles and amphibians, the endemic Sarso Island racer snake and the Arabian Toad (*Sclerophrys arabica*) are notable. Collectively, these species illustrate the outstanding biodiversity value of the Farasan Islands, highlighting the critical role of the site in conserving globally significant marine and terrestrial fauna.

4.4 - Physical components

4.4.1 - Climate

Climatic region	Subregion
B: Dry climate	BWh: Subtropical desert (Low-latitude desert)

The Farasan Islands experience a hot desert climate (BWh) with high temperatures throughout the year, very low annual rainfall, and high evaporation rates. Climatic changes affecting the site include increased variability of rainfall, with occasional intense storms causing flash flooding and soil erosion, while prolonged dry periods intensify drought conditions. Rising sea levels and increasing sea surface temperatures also threaten coastal ecosystems, particularly mangroves (*Avicennia marina*, *Rhizophora mucronata*) and seagrass beds, which are vital for biodiversity and shoreline protection. These changes may further impact freshwater availability, vegetation cover, and the overall resilience of habitats supporting terrestrial and marine wildlife.

4.4.2 - Geomorphic setting

a) Minimum elevation above sea level (in metres)

a) Maximum elevation above sea level (in metres)

Entire river basin ☐

Upper part of river basin ☐

Middle part of river basin ☐

Lower part of river basin ☐

More than one river basin ☐

Not in river basin ☐

Coastal ☒

Please name the river basin or basins. If the site lies in a sub-basin, please also name the larger river basin. For a coastal/marine site, please name the sea or ocean.

The Farasan Islands are a coastal archipelago in the Red Sea, characterized by very low elevation ranging from sea level to a maximum of 3 meters. The site is not associated with any river basin but is strongly influenced by its marine and coastal setting. The geomorphic features include coral reefs, mangrove stands, tidal flats, seagrass beds, and sandy shores. These features provide critical habitats for a wide range of marine and terrestrial species and play a vital role in shoreline stabilization and nutrient cycling.

4.4.3 - Soil

Mineral ☒

Organic ☐

No available information ☐

Are soil types subject to change as a result of changing hydrological conditions (e.g., increased salinity or acidification)? Yes ☒ No ☐

Please provide further information on the soil (optional)

The soil types show the islands as characterized largely by (58) Udipsamments–Torripsamments: marine flats and dunes, and coral rock outcrops. Soils on the islands are almost entirely derived from the fossil coral bedrock or weathering of the coral reef and seashells. The fossil coral produces a poor infertile lithosol of gravelly sand.

4.4.4 - Water regime

Water permanence

Presence?	
Usually permanent water present	No change

Source of water that maintains character of the site

Presence?	Predominant water source	
Marine water	☐	No change

Water destination

Presence?	
Marine	No change

Stability of water regime

Presence?	
Water levels fluctuating (including tidal)	No change

Please add any comments on the water regime and its determinants (if relevant). Use this box to explain sites with complex hydrology:

The hydrological regime of the Farasan Islands is permanently marine, maintained by the Red Sea. The water regime is strongly influenced by tidal fluctuations, which drive the exchange of nutrients, sediments, and salinity levels. These dynamics support key ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrass beds, and coral reefs. The absence of freshwater inflows means that marine conditions dominate, making the system sensitive to sea level rise and temperature changes.

4.4.5 - Sediment regime

Significant erosion of sediments occurs on the site ☒

Significant accretion or deposition of sediments occurs on the site ☒

Significant transportation of sediments occurs on or through the site ☒

Sediment regime is highly variable, either seasonally or inter-annually ☒

Sediment regime unknown ☐

Please provide further information on sediment (optional):

The sediment regime of the Farasan Islands is shaped by strong hydrodynamic processes including tidal fluctuations, wave action, and seasonal storms. Erosion occurs along exposed shorelines, while accretion is observed in sheltered bays, mangrove areas, and tidal flats. Sediment transport is continuous due to marine currents, contributing to the dynamic nature of the coastal habitats. The regime is highly variable, with seasonal and inter-annual fluctuations influencing mangrove stability, seagrass beds, and coral reef health.

4.4.6 - Water pH

Acid (pH<5.5) ☐

Circumneutral (pH: 5.5-7.4) ☐

Alkaline (pH>7.4) ☐

Unknown ☒

4.4.7 - Water salinity

Fresh (<0.5 g/l) ☐

Mixohaline (brackish)/Mixosaline (0.5-30 g/l) ☐

Euhaline/Eusaline (30-40 g/l) ☒

Hyperhaline/Hypersaline (>40 g/l) ☐

Unknown ☐

Please provide further information on salinity (optional):

The salinity of the Farasan Islands waters typically ranges between 36–39 g/l, consistent with the Red Sea conditions. Minor fluctuations occur seasonally and locally, influenced by high evaporation rates, limited freshwater input, and tidal exchange.

(ECD) Dissolved gases in water

The waters around the Farasan Islands generally have adequate levels of dissolved oxygen, supporting diverse marine life including coral reefs, seagrass beds, and mangroves. Oxygen concentrations may vary slightly due to temperature, salinity, and biological activity, but remain within ranges suitable for sustaining healthy marine ecosystems.

4.4.8 - Dissolved or suspended nutrients in water

Eutrophic ☐

Mesotrophic ☐

Oligotrophic ☒

Dystrophic ☐

Unknown ☐

Please provide further information on dissolved or suspended nutrients (optional):

The waters around the Farasan Islands are generally oligotrophic, with low concentrations of dissolved nutrients typical of the Red Sea. However, localized nutrient enrichment may occur in mangrove stands, seagrass meadows, and coral reef areas, supporting high biodiversity despite overall nutrient-poor conditions.

4.4.9 - Features of the surrounding area which may affect the Site

Please describe whether, and if so how, the landscape and ecological

characteristics in the area surrounding the Ramsar Site differ from the i) broadly similar ☐ ii) significantly different ☒
site itself:

Surrounding area has greater urbanisation or development ☒

Surrounding area has higher human population density ☒

Surrounding area has more intensive agricultural use ☐

Surrounding area has significantly different land cover or habitat types ☒

Please describe other ways in which the surrounding area is different:

The surrounding area of the Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve is significantly different from the Ramsar site itself. While the Reserve encompasses largely natural habitats such as mangroves, seagrass beds, and coral reefs, the surrounding areas include the town of Farasan with increasing urbanization and infrastructure development. This results in higher human population density compared to the core protected areas.

4.5 - Ecosystem services

4.5.1 - Ecosystem services/benefits

Provisioning Services

Ecosystem service	Examples	Importance/Extent/Significance
Food for humans	Sustenance for humans (e.g., fish, molluscs, grains)	High

Regulating Services

Ecosystem service	Examples	Importance/Extent/Significance
Erosion protection	Soil, sediment and nutrient retention	Medium

Cultural Services

Ecosystem service	Examples	Importance/Extent/Significance
Recreation and tourism	Nature observation and nature-based tourism	High

Supporting Services

Ecosystem service	Examples	Importance/Extent/Significance
Biodiversity	Supports a variety of all life forms including plants, animals and microorganisms, the genes they contain, and the ecosystems of which they form a part	High

Other ecosystem service(s) not included above:

The area provides several ecosystem services and products that are critical for the well-being of local communities. For instance, mangrove and seagrass ecosystems serve as sinks for pollutants, and organic and inorganic materials, control floods, and improve coastal water quality. Additionally, mangrove and coral reef ecosystems support life underwater, protect shorelines from currents, waves, and storms, and thus, prevent beach erosion. In terms of ecosystem products, the Farasan Islands' Marine Protected Area provides local communities with seafood products incl. such including fish, crustaceans, mussels, sea cucumbers, and seaweeds which are critical protein and income sources to the local communities and beyond.

Outside the site: 1000

Have studies or assessments been made of the economic valuation of ecosystem services provided by this Ramsar Site? Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown ☒

4.5.2 - Social and cultural values

i) the site provides a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland ☐

ii) the site has exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland ☐

iii) the ecological character of the wetland depends on its interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples ☐

iv) relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland ☐

<no data available>

4.6 - Ecological processes

<no data available>

5 - How is the Site managed? (Conservation and management)

5.1 - Land tenure and responsibilities (Managers)

5.1.1 - Land tenure/ownership

Public ownership

Category	Within the Ramsar Site	In the surrounding area
National/Federal government	☒	☒

Other

Category	Within the Ramsar Site	In the surrounding area
Commoners/customary rights	☐	☒

Provide further information on the land tenure / ownership regime (optional):

The Ramsar Site is fully under the ownership and management of the National Center for Wildlife (Saudi Arabia). In the surrounding areas, local communities exercise customary rights, primarily small-scale fishing and limited grazing, which are recognized and regulated by the government.

5.1.2 - Management authority

Please list the local office / offices of any agency or organization responsible for managing the site:

National Center for Wildlife (NCW) – Saudi Arabia
Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve Management Office

Provide the name and/or title of the person or people with responsibility for the wetland:

National Center for Wildlife (NCW) – Saudi Arabia

Postal address:

National Center for Wildlife
P.O. Box 61681
Riyadh 11575
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

E-mail address:

a.alrikabi@ncw.gov.sa

5.2 - Ecological character threats and responses (Management)

5.2.1 - Factors (actual or likely) adversely affecting the Site's ecological character

Transportation and service corridors

Factors adversely affecting site	Actual threat	Potential threat	Within the site	In the surrounding area
Shipping lanes	Low impact	Low impact	☐	☒

Biological resource use

Factors adversely affecting site	Actual threat	Potential threat	Within the site	In the surrounding area
Fishing and harvesting aquatic resources	High impact	High impact	☒	☐

Human intrusions and disturbance

Factors adversely affecting site	Actual threat	Potential threat	Within the site	In the surrounding area
Recreational and tourism activities	Medium impact	Medium impact	☐	☒

Invasive and other problematic species and genes

Factors adversely affecting site	Actual threat	Potential threat	Within the site	In the surrounding area
Invasive non-native/ alien species	Medium impact	Medium impact	☒	☒

Climate change and severe weather

Factors adversely affecting site	Actual threat	Potential threat	Within the site	In the surrounding area
Habitat shifting and alteration	High impact	High impact	☐	☒

Please describe any other threats (optional):

Key concerns include coral bleaching, primarily due to climate change, which significantly affects the coral reefs. Sedimentation also hinders coral recovery by covering the reefs with a layer of sediment. Human activities such as boat anchoring and potential pollution from nearby developments and shipping add to these natural threats. Additionally, potentially unsustainable fishing practices and the poaching of seabird and turtle eggs pose threats to the biodiversity.

Threats from disturbance and impact of commercial shipping appear to be low as majority of large vessel traffic emanating from the commercial ports in Jizan at the shores of the mainland.

5.2.2 - Legal conservation status

Global legal designations

Designation type	Name of area	Online information url	Overlap with Ramsar Site
UNESCO Biosphere Reserve	Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve	https://ksaforunesco.org/farasan-islands-added-to-global-biosphere-reserves-network/ : https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6370/	whole

Regional (international) legal designations

Designation type	Name of area	Online information url	Overlap with Ramsar Site
Other international designation	Farasan Islands Important Bird Area	https://datazone.birdlife.org/site/factsheet/farasan-islands	whole

National legal designations

Designation type	Name of area	Online information url	Overlap with Ramsar Site
National Protected Area	Farasan Islands Protected Area	https://www.ncw.gov.sa/protected-areas	whole

5.2.3 - IUCN protected areas categories (2008)

- Ia Strict Nature Reserve ☐
- Ib Wilderness Area: protected area managed mainly for wilderness protection ☐
- II National Park: protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation ☐
- III Natural Monument: protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features ☐
- IV Habitat/Species Management Area: protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention ☐
- V Protected Landscape/Seascape: protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation ☐
- VI Managed Resource Protected Area: protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems ☒

5.2.4 - Key conservation measures

Legal protection

Measures	Status
Legal protection	Implemented

Habitat

Measures	Status
Hydrology management/restoration	Partially implemented
Faunal corridors/passage	Implemented
Catchment management initiatives/controls	Partially implemented

Species

Measures	Status
Control of invasive alien plants	Implemented
Control of invasive alien animals	Implemented
Threatened/rare species management programmes	Implemented

Human Activities

Measures	Status
Regulation/management of wastes	Implemented
Harvest controls/poaching enforcement	Implemented
Research	Implemented
Regulation/management of recreational activities	Implemented
Communication, education, and participation and awareness activities	Implemented

Other:

The Farasan Archipelago, a unique terrestrial, coastal, and marine ecosystem in the southern Red Sea, has faced significant conservation challenges due to habitat degradation, unsustainable resource use, and invasive species spread. The Farasan islands protected area is home to diverse terrestrial marine biodiversity, and critical blue carbon ecosystems. The National Centre for Wildlife (NCW) of Saudi Arabia implemented a comprehensive conservation program to address these threats. This included a biannual biodiversity monitoring plan, habitat restoration efforts, invasive species management, fisheries regulation, and enhanced law enforcement. The program has led to measurable conservation successes, including the stabilization and gradual increase of the avifaunal population, improved coral reef and seagrass health, and heightened public awareness of biodiversity protection. The reserve now stands as a model for integrated conservation and balanced ecological sustainability.

5.2.5 - Management planning

Is there a site-specific management plan for the site? No

Has a management effectiveness assessment been undertaken for the site? Yes ☐ No ☒

If the site is a formal transboundary site as indicated in section Data and location > Site location, are there shared management planning processes with another Contracting Party? Yes ☐ No ☒

Please indicate if a Ramsar centre, other educational or visitor facility, or an educational or visitor programme is associated with the site:

The current amenities consist of multiple ranger stations that offer general guidance and information to visitors and are accessible to visiting scientists.

5.2.6 - Planning for restoration

Is there a site-specific restoration plan? Yes, there is a plan

5.2.7 - Monitoring implemented or proposed

Monitoring	Status
Plant community	Implemented
Animal species (please specify)	Implemented
Birds	Implemented
Water quality	Implemented

a detailed monitoring plan is in place for the reserve including the Ramsar site comprising the following activities:

1. Biodiversity Conservation:

- Reef monitoring for coral cover and bleaching
- Fisheries monitoring (species and total catch)
- Detailed resource mapping followed by zonation plan
- Follow up on mapping with mangrove and seagrass monitoring, if merited
- Turtle nesting beaches to be GPS-mapped and nests recorded
- Bird colonies mapped and censused
- Annual census for dugongs and other marine mammals
- Monitoring of alien species and white-tailed mongoose.
- Climate monitoring Rainfall data from the rainfall station is to be collected monthly
- Obtain climate outlook forum data for forthcoming rainy season.
- Wildlife numbers / density trends / Sex & age classification by transect counts, waterhole counts etc.
- Antelope population census data must be accurate and suitable for management decisions
- Vegetation production and cover
- Document bird mortalities on powerlines.

2. Visitor Management & Tourism

- Visitor numbers with information on date of visit, entrance point used, provenance (local, international)

3. Community Engagement

- Number of jobs filled by local people (annually)
- Monetary amount in benefication through local service contracts and supplies (annually)
- Community Based Organization development to support and expand mangrove and birding areas.

4. Area Integrity

- Patrol Coverage and Observations utilizing Ranger based monitoring systems – Rasit or Domain Awareness System
- Incident registers, perimeter integrity reports, offences schedules, staff attendance.
- Focus on patrol quality not quantity

5. Protected Area Management

- Monthly inspections of the Farasan Islands infrastructure to identify and address maintenance needs.
- Quarterly reviews of facility usage
- Regular compliance and enforcement audits covering health and safety, environmental, risk and law enforcement to ensure policies are being followed

6. Sustainability (Waste, energy, climate change, pollution control

- Pollution (sediment, water quality, beach litter, industrial effluent and seepage, oil)
- Measurement of water use at waterholes and each of the sites where amenities are provided.
- Bi-annual environmental audit

6 - Additional material

6.1 - Additional reports and documents

6.1.1 - Bibliographical references

National Center for Wildlife (NCW). (2022). Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve: Management and Conservation Report. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
 BirdLife International. (2021). Important Bird Areas factsheet: Farasan Islands. Cambridge, UK.
 Gladstone, W. (2000). The ecological and conservation importance of mangroves in the Farasan Islands, Saudi Arabia. Biodiversity and Conservation, 9(11), 1461–1481.
 AbuZinada, A. H., Robinson, E. R., & Nader, I. A. (2001). First Saudi Arabian National Report on the Convention on Biological Diversity. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
 IUCN. (2016). Red List of Threatened Species. International Union for Conservation of Nature.
 PERSGA. (2004). Status of the Marine Environment in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
 Scott, D.A. (ed.) 1995. A Directory of Wetlands in the Middle East. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and IWRB, Slimbridge, U.K.
 Evans, M.I. (ed.) (1994). Important Bird Areas in the Middle East. BirdLife Conservation Series No.2. BirdLife International, Cambridge, U.K. 410 pp.
 Abuzinada, A.H. & Krupp, F. (eds). (1994). The Status of Coastal and Marine Habitats Two Years after the Gulf War Oil Spill. Cour. Forsch. Inst. Senckenberg 166. 80 pp.

6.1.2 - Additional reports and documents

i. taxonomic lists of plant and animal species occurring in the site (see section 4.3)

<1 file(s) uploaded>

ii. a detailed Ecological Character Description (ECD) (in a national format)

<no file available>

iii. a description of the site in a national or regional wetland inventory

<1 file(s) uploaded>

iv. relevant Article 3.2 reports

<1 file(s) uploaded>

v. site management plan

<1 file(s) uploaded>

vi. other published literature

<no file available>

6.1.3 - Photograph(s) of the Site

Please provide at least one photograph of the site:



Mangrove forests in Farasan Islands Biosphere Reserve Seagrass meadows along the coastal waters of Farasan Islands (National Center for Wildlife (Saudi Arabia), 07-03-2023)



Shallow marine water (National Center for Wildlife (Saudi Arabia), 10-01-2024)



Larus Genei at Farasan Biosphere Reserve (National Center for Wildlife (Saudi Arabia), 10-01-2024)

6.1.4 - Designation letter and related data

Designation letter

<1 file(s) uploaded>

Date of Designation 2025-10-19