



Ramsar Sites Information Service

Annotated List of Wetlands of International Importance

South Africa

23 Ramsar Site(s) covering 557,028 ha

Barberspan

Site number: 35 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: North-West
Area: 3,118 ha | Coordinates: 26°35'S 25°35'E | Designation dates: 12-03-1975
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Barberspan. 12/03/75; Northwest; 3,118 ha; 26°33'S 025°37'E. Provincial Nature Reserve. One of the few permanent, natural water bodies in the highveld. An alkaline, freshwater lake, surrounded by grassland. The lake supports a rich plankton community and ten fish species, and is seasonally important for staging and breeding birds and locally migrant waterbirds. A research station and recreational facilities are located at the site. Ramsar site no. 35. Most recent RIS information: 1998.

Blesbokspruit

Site number: 343 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Gauteng
Area: 1,858 ha | Coordinates: 26°19'S 28°30'E | Designation dates: 02-10-1986
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Blesbokspruit. 02/10/86; Gauteng; 1,858 ha; 26°17'S 028°30'E. Added to the Montreux Record, 6 May 1996. Bird Sanctuary, Nature Reserve. One of the few permanent water bodies in the Transvaal region. Formed during the 1930 construction of road and pipeline embankments for the mining industry. Seasonally important for several species of locally migrant waterbirds and various notable mammals. Mining activities take place upstream. The site was placed on the Montreux Record in May 1996 in response to contamination by large quantities of polluted water discharged from adjacent mines. Ramsar site no. 343. Most recent RIS information: 1995.

Bot - Kleinmond Estuarine System

Site number: 2,291 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Western Cape Province
Area: 1,349.8 ha | Coordinates: 34°21'S 19°07'E | Designation dates: 31-01-2017
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

The Bot-Kleinmond Estuarine System is in the coastal Southern African temperate area, within the Agulhas Bioregion. It consists of an estuarine lake, flanked by deeply weathered Bokkeveld shale terrain and mountains oriented perpendicular to the coastline. The Site is recognized as one of the ten most significant wetlands for waterbirds in South Africa during the dry summer months; 86 species of waterbird have been recorded there. The bird community changes markedly from year to year according to changes in the estuary conditions related to water levels and periodic breaches of the estuary mouth. Overall bird abundance is determined mainly by the presence or absence of red-knobbed coots (*Fulica cristata*) which can occur in extremely high numbers. The Site is also important as a nursery area for fish, with 41 species from 24 families recorded, of which 19 species are dependent on estuaries to complete their lifecycle. The surrounding communities of Kleinmond, Fisherhaven and Hawston have a close relationship with the Bot River estuary. Many residents and holidaymakers use the estuary for fishing, swimming and boating. Some invasive species (including the red-eyed wattle *Acacia cyclops* and the African clawed frog *Xenopus laevis*) have had major impacts.

De Hoop Vlei

Site number: 34 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Western Cape

Area: 750 ha | Coordinates: 34°27'S 20°23'E | Designation dates: 12-03-1975

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

De Hoop Vlei. 12/03/75; Western Cape; 750 ha; 34°27'S 020°20'E. Provincial Nature Reserve. A coastal lake of seasonally varying levels of water and salinity, formed when dunes blocked the course of the Sout River. Important for numerous species of wintering and staging waterbirds. A major research programme is under way to monitor the impact of the military test range on the ecology of the reserve and surrounding area. The native turtle, common in the 1960s, has since become rare. Ramsar site no. 34. Most recent RIS information: 1998.

De Mond

Site number: 342 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Western Cape

Area: 918 ha | Coordinates: 34°43'S 20°07'E | Designation dates: 02-10-1986

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

De Mond (Heuningnes Estuary). 02/10/86; Western Cape; 918 ha; 34°43'S 020°07'E. Nature Reserve. Estuary, dune system, and saltmarsh where shifting dunes are isolating the estuary. Important as wintering, staging and feeding area for several species of breeding birds and locally migrant waterbirds. Provides habitat for various reptiles, notable crustaceans, and the sea horse Hippocampus. Ramsar site no. 342. Most recent RIS information: 1998.

False Bay Nature Reserve

Site number: 2,219 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Western Cape province of South Africa

Area: 1,542 ha | Coordinates: 34°04'S 18°30'E | Designation dates: 02-02-2015

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The False Bay Nature Reserve is a unique area on the Cape Flats, situated between False Bay and Table Bay, consisting of about 50% permanent wetland and 49% terrestrial vegetation including the critically endangered Cape Flats Sand Fynbos and Cape Flats Dune Strandveld and some sand beaches. The False Bay Nature Reserve contains two lakes, of which Rondevlei is a protected area reserve while Zeekoevlei is a residential area and a popular yachting, canoeing and wind-surfing venue. Both lakes support large populations of waterbirds including pelicans and flamingoes.

Serving as a reservoir of biodiversity, the Site supports important populations of mammals including the hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*), cape clawless otter (*Aonyx capensis*), water mongoose (*Atilax paludinosus*), cape grysbok (*Raphicerus melanotis*), steenbok (*Raphicerus campestris*), southern African vlei rat (*Otomys irroratus*), large spotted genet (*Genetta tigrina*) and small grey mongoose (*Galerella pulverulenta*). About 256 species of indigenous plants grow on the Site including two endemic plant species currently listed as extinct in the wild, namely *Erica turgida* and *Erica verticillata* (Cape Flats erica).

The False Bay Nature Reserve is home to over 60% of the bird species in the South-western Cape (228 species) with notable examples including the little stint (*Calidris minuta*), ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), pied avocet (*Recurvirostra avocetta*), common tern (*Sterna hirundo*), greater flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*), and the great white pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*).

In addition to being an important conservation area containing endemic vegetation types and species, the False Bay Nature Reserve offer various recreational services, including fishing, water sports and picnics.

Kosi Bay

Site number: 527 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Kwazulu Natal

Area: 10,982 ha | Coordinates: 27°01'S 32°50'E | Designation dates: 28-06-1991

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Kosi Bay. 28/06/91; Kwazulu/Natal; 10,982 ha; 27°01'S 032°48'E. Nature Reserve. Composed of four interconnected lakes subject to tidal influence, an estuarine channel, and three extensive swamps. Fresh water is derived from three permanent rivers. Principal habitats include swamp and mangrove forest, reedbeds, dune systems with associated woodland, and coastal grassland. The site supports a diverse bottom-dwelling invertebrate fauna (30 species) and a rich fish fauna, including eight endangered species. Several birds, mammals, butterflies, and plants are endemic, threatened or endangered. Large areas of swamp forest have been subjected to non-sustainable slash and burn cultivation practices. Human activities include subsistence farming and fishing. Ramsar site no. 527. Most recent RIS information: 1988.

Lake Sibaya

Site number: 528 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Kwazulu Natal

Area: 7,750 ha | Coordinates: 27°21'S 32°40'E | Designation dates: 28-06-1991

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Lake Sibaya. 28/06/91; Kwazulu/Natal; 7,750 ha; 27°20'S 032°38'E. The largest natural freshwater lake in South Africa, separated from the ocean by forested dunes; includes areas of swamp forest and wet grassland. A large variety of endangered or endemic species of reptiles, fish, birds, mammals and plants occur. The site is important for numerous species of breeding birds and supports the second largest population of hippopotamus in Kwa Zulu. The lake supports a diverse zooplankton fauna, 15 species of aquatic and 43 species of terrestrial molluscs, as well as flora and fauna unique to South Africa. A research station is located within the site. The lake provides water for Mbazwane and Vasi. Human activities consist of livestock grazing and cultivation. Ramsar site no. 528. Most recent RIS information: 1988.

Langebaan

Site number: 398 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Western Cape

Area: 6,000 ha | Coordinates: 33°09'S 18°04'E | Designation dates: 25-04-1988

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Langebaan. 25/04/88; Western Cape; 6,000 ha; 33°06'S 018°01'E. National Park. A large, shallow marine lagoon, includes islands, reedbeds, sand flats, saltmarshes and dwarf shrubland. The lagoon is an important nursery area for a number of fish species and supports a diverse and ecologically important algal and shoreline biota. Important for wintering and staging wading birds, and the numerous breeding birds include the largest colony of gulls in South Africa. Human activities include farming, sheep/cattle rearing, and a small commercial fishery. There are an environmental education centre, bird observation hides, and several nature trails. Plans to construct an industrial facility reached agreement with Ramsar input; a case study is available. Ramsar site no. 398.

Makuleke Wetlands

Site number: 1,687 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Limpopo
Area: 7,757 ha | Coordinates: 22°23'S 31°12'E | Designation dates: 22-05-2007
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Makuleke Wetlands. 22/05/07; Limpopo; 7,757 hectares; 22°23'S 031°11'E. National Park. An excellent example of a floodplain vlei type, most of which lies within the Kruger National Park, bordered by Zimbabwe and Mozambique to the north and east. Prominent features include riverine forests, riparian floodplain forests, floodplain grasslands, river channels and flood pans. Flood pans are depressions in the floodplains which are intermittently filled from floods and rains - they are of great importance in this ecosystem as they hold water right into the dry season, thus acting as a refuge point for wildlife and waterbirds during both winter and summer months, and there are 31 of them found on these floodplains, where herds of Hippopotamus (Hippopotamus amphibious) are found. The floodplains attenuate floods, resulting in reduced flood damage in downstream areas of Mozambique, are important for groundwater recharge, and maintain riparian and floodplain vegetation. In the Makuleke Region of the National Park there is an attempt to harmonize biodiversity protection with the interests of rural dwellers through cooperation between the Community Property Association of Makuleke community, South African National Parks Board, and many government departments. The proclamation of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) in 2002 through an international treaty between South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe aims at jointly managing the bordering National Parks and conservation areas, and the Ramsar site will benefit from that protection status. Ramsar site no. 1687. Most recent RIS information: 2007.

Natal Drakensberg Park

Site number: 886 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Kwazulu Natal
Area: 242,813 ha | Coordinates: 29°24'S 29°24'E | Designation dates: 21-01-1997
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Natal Drakensberg Park. 21/01/97; Kwazulu/Natal; 242,813 ha; 29°30'S 029°45'E. Wilderness Area, Nature Reserve, Game Reserve, Provincial Park, State Forest. Set in an extremely rugged area that includes three altitudinal zones along the border between South Africa and the Kingdom of Lesotho, The Drakensberg is regarded as the most important mountain catchment in South Africa due to its high yield and water quality, supplying rural, agricultural, urban and industrial users downstream. Conserved since the turn of the century, the entire wetland system is in near-pristine state. The three largest rivers in Kwa Zulu-Natal originate here, supporting extensive wetlands of various types within the Afro-alpine and Afromontane belts. The area supports numerous endemic and endangered plant and animal species. Human activities include nature conservation and a variety of outdoor recreation activities. There are a research station and a conservation education center available. The site is renowned for the quantity, quality and variety of prehistoric rock art. Many parts are declared wilderness areas. Ramsar site no. 886. Most recent RIS information: 1996.

Ndumo Game Reserve

Site number: 887 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Kwazulu Natal
Area: 10,117 ha | Coordinates: 26°53'S 32°16'E | Designation dates: 21-01-1997
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Ndumo Game Reserve. 21/01/97; Kwazulu/Natal; 10,117 ha; 26°53'S 032°16'E. Nature Reserve. Situated at the junction of the Usuthu and Pongolo floodplain systems, the site forms the largest floodplain system in South Africa, consisting of five wetland types, from fresh to brackish, permanent to ephemeral lakes, marshes and pools, as well as riparian and gallery forest. Well known for its abundant bird life and diversity of species, internationally important numbers of several species are supported, including many that are rare or vulnerable. Human activities include controlled harvesting of reeds and sedges, low-density tourism, an important fishery, illegal black and white rhinoceros hunting, and collecting river water for sale in nearby communities. A large agricultural irrigation scheme is operating erratically south of the reserve in the catchment area. Ramsar site no. 887. Most recent RIS information: 1996.

Ntsikeni Nature Reserve

Site number: 1,904 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Province

Area: 9,200 ha | Coordinates: 30°08'S 29°28'E | Designation dates: 02-02-2010

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Ntsikeni Nature Reserve.02/02/10; KwaZulu/Natal; 9,200 ha; 30°08'S 29°28'E. Nature Reserve. Located in an area rich in wetlands, the site is one of the largest high altitude wetlands in South Africa and has undergone the least ecological change due to the protective measures in place as a Nature Reserve. It is recognised as the second most important breeding site for the Wattled Crane in South Africa and also as significant to the endangered Long-toed Tree Frog (*Leptopelis xenodactylus*), Oriibi (*Ourebia ourebi*), and other wetland dependent mammals. Because it is a Nature Reserve there are no commercial activities carried out within the site. However the maintenance of its character is under threat from commercial afforestation activities occurring outside of its borders that are a major source of alien invasive species. While there is no management plan in place, there are measures under the Protected Areas Act to ensure that the site continues to play its various roles including provision of clean water to the communities downstream where there is no formally organised supply. Ramsar site no. 1904. Most recent RIS information: 2010.

Nylsvley Nature Reserve

Site number: 952 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Northern Province

Area: 3,970 ha | Coordinates: 24°39'S 28°42'E | Designation dates: 07-07-1998

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Nylsvley Nature Reserve. 07/07/98; Northern Province; 3,970 ha; 24°39'S 028°42'E. Nature reserve. The nature reserve has riverine floodplains, flooded river basins, and seasonally flooded grassland, with the dominant wetland type being a seasonal river associated with a grassland floodplain. The wetland has the endangered roan antelope *Hippotragus equis*, and the area serves as a breeding ground for eight South African red-listed waterbirds and is the only site in South Africa which is a recorded locality for wild rice, *Oryza longistaminata*. The area is open to tourists, who usually come for birdwatching, and volunteers work in the area to help clear alien invasive plant species and build bird hides. Ramsar site no. 952. Most recent RIS information: 1997.

Orange River Mouth

Site number: 526 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Northern Cape

Area: 2,000 ha | Coordinates: 28°36'S 16°28'E | Designation dates: 28-06-1991

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Orange River Mouth. 28/06/91; Northern Cape; 2,000 ha; 28°40'S 016°30'E. Added to the Montreux Record, 26 September 1995. Transboundary area of extensive saltmarshes, freshwater lagoons and marshes, sand banks, and reedbeds shared by South Africa and Namibia. Important for resident birds and for staging locally migrant waterbirds. The upper Orange River serves as a domestic water source and is experiencing increasing demand. This could severely restrict the amount of water reaching the site. Following the collapse of the saltmarsh component of the estuary, the site was placed on the Montreux Record in 1995. The rapid degradation was the result of adjacent diamond mining activities and flow regulation of the Orange River as a result of dam construction. Ramsar site no. 526. Most recent RIS information: 1990.

Prince Edward Islands

Site number: 1,688 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Western Cape Province

Area: 37,500 ha | Coordinates: 46°52'S 37°46'E | Designation dates: 22-05-2007

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Prince Edward Islands. 22/05/07; Western Cape; 37,500 ha; 46°46'S 037°51'E. Includes the larger Marion Island (46°54'S 037°45'E) and the smaller Prince Edward Island (46°38'S 037°57'E), which are classified as sub-Antarctic and are of volcanic origin. They are protected natural habitats and do not support any consumptive or exploitative activities. The three main terrestrial habitats are unvegetated uplands, well-drained vegetated slopes, and poorly-drained vegetated coastal plains. Significant wetland formations include non-forested peat lands (swamps and bogs), intermittent streams, waterfalls, freshwater ponds, crater lakes, rocky marine shores, kelp beds, sea cliffs and sand shores. The islands host numerous breeding seabirds like the vulnerable Wandering Albatrosses (*Diomedea exulans*) and White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) and the endangered Sooty Albatross (*Phoebetria fusca*) and Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalassarche carteri*). Three penguin species breed and moult on the rocky areas around the coastline; the King Penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*), Macaroni Penguin (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*) and Eastern Rockhopper Penguin (*E. c. filholi*). Commercial tourism and fishing within territorial waters are prohibited. The principal activities on these islands since their annexation by South Africa in 1947 and 1948 include meteorological observations, scientific research, logistic support for research and conservation and management activities. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing for Patagonian Toothfish in the surrounding waters caused reduction in fish stock and high levels of incidental mortality of seabirds. This has declined in recent years, however. Ramsar site no. 1688. Most recent RIS information: 2007.

Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve

Site number: 888 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Free State

Area: 4,754 ha | Coordinates: 27°36'S 29°35'E | Designation dates: 21-01-1997

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve. 21/01/97; Free State; 4,754 ha; 27°34'S 029°35'E. Nature Reserve. The largest inland wetland in the Highveld. It has high conservation priority, as it provides water to the highly industrialized and densely populated Gauteng Province. It is a world-renowned sanctuary rich in birdlife and supporting several species of rare or endangered birds and mammals. The site consists of seasonal freshwater lakes, riverine floodplain, seasonally flooded grasslands, marshes and pools, and peatlands. Human activities include tourism and livestock grazing. Ramsar site no. 888. Most recent RIS information: 1996.

St. Lucia System

Site number: 345 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Kwazulu Natal

Area: 155,500 ha | Coordinates: 27°55'S 32°30'E | Designation dates: 02-10-1986

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

St. Lucia System. 02/10/86; Kwazulu/Natal; 155,500 ha; 28°04'S 032°28'E. Added to the Montreux Record, 4 July 1990, removed from the Record, 11 March 1996. Wetland Park, State Forest Reserve. Coastal wetlands system associated with Lake St. Lucia and consisting of several principal habitat types. Supports the largest estuarine prawn nursery area in South Africa. An important migratory bird staging area, feeding ground for flamingos, and spawning and nursery area for many of the 82 species of fish supported. It is also a breeding area for crocodiles. Large mammals include hippopotamus and black rhino. Human activities have included cattle grazing, slash and burn cultivation, and the planting of *Pinus elliottii*. The site is an important recreational area offering many facilities and activities. The site was threatened by large-scale mining for heavy metals but spared. Subject of a Ramsar Advisory Mission in 1992. A case study is available. Ramsar site no. 345. Most recent RIS information: 1998.

Turtle Beaches/Coral Reefs of Tongaland

Site number: 344 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Kwazulu Natal
Area: 39,500 ha | Coordinates: 27°30'S 32°44'E | Designation dates: 02-10-1986
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Turtle Beaches/Coral Reefs of Tongaland. 02/10/86; Kwazulu/Natal; 39,500 ha; 27°30'S 032°40'E. Marine Reserve. An important transition zone between true reef and non-limestone substrates with reef communities. Known to support 16 species of coral, 1,200 species of fish, five species of marine turtles, 41 species of marine mammal, and 49 species of bird. The flora is predominantly algal, and many species reach the southern limit of their distribution. General water recreation is a popular activity. Ramsar site no. 344. Most recent RIS information: 1984.

uMgeni Vlei Nature Reserve

Site number: 2,132 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: KwaZulu-Natal
Area: 958 ha | Coordinates: 29°30'S 29°50'E | Designation dates: 19-03-2013
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

uMgeni Vlei Nature Reserve. 19/03/2013; KwaZulu-Natal; 958 ha; 29°29'34"S 029°49'43"E. Nature Reserve; BirdLife IBA. Permanent freshwater marshes and pools consisting mainly of grasslands and a few small areas of scrubby woodland. Located at about 1,840m asl in the Drakensberg Alpine Centre biodiversity hotspot, the site contains endemic and nationally threatened plant species including *Merwillia natalensis* and the KwaZulu-Natal endemic *Kniphofia brachystachya* and *Kniphofia breviflora*. It is a key representative remnant of the natural wetlands in the Highland Sourveld bioregion and noted to be an important breeding ground for several waterbirds including the IUCN Red-Listed Blue Crane *Anthropoides paradiseus*, Crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum*, and Wattled Crane *Bugeranus carunculatus* (2-3 breeding pairs present, representing over 2-3 % of the South African breeding Population). The site and its surrounding area are threatened by the invasive American bramble *Rubus cuneifolius*. Ramsar site no. 2132. Most recent RIS information: 2013

Verloren Valei Nature Reserve

Site number: 1,110 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Mpumalanga Province
Area: 5,891 ha | Coordinates: 25°19'S 30°07'E | Designation dates: 16-10-2001
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Verloren Valei Nature Reserve. 16/10/01; Mpumalanga; 5,891 ha; 25°17'S 030°09'E. Nature Reserve. A provincial protected area above 2000m altitude comprising more than 30 wetlands (14% of the site's area), ranging between 2 and 250 hectares, primarily permanent freshwater marshes, with the emergent vegetation waterlogged for most of the season. The area is especially important hydrologically because it acts as a sponge in the upper catchment of important river systems for both South Africa and Mozambique, ensuring gradual release to more populous downstream regions during rainy periods. It supports high botanical diversity and is one of the last areas with suitable Wattled Crane *Bugeranus carunculata* breeding habitat. A variety of wetland types characteristic of the region is represented, and a significant number of vulnerable and threatened plant, butterfly, and mammal species are supported. Population density in the area is low, but farming and grazing occur in the surrounding areas. A management plan, including controlled burning, is in place, employing local people. Small-scale avi-tourism occurs and guided tours are planned. No urgent threats are foreseen, though introduced exotic plant species are being watched carefully. Ramsar site no. 1110. Most recent RIS information: 2000.

Verlorenvlei

Site number: 525 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Western Cape
Area: 1,500 ha | Coordinates: 32°21'S 18°25'E | Designation dates: 28-06-1991
[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Verlorenvlei. 28/06/91; Western Cape; 1,500 ha; 32°24'S 018°26'E. One of the largest lakes (and one of the country's few coastal freshwater lakes), with associated scrub, shrubland, dune systems, marshland and reedbeds representing a transition zone between two plant communities. The site is an important feeding area for rare pelicans and fish, for molting and breeding birds, as well as for staging wading birds. During dry periods, large numbers of flamingos gather. The site also supports notable plant species. Water is pumped for irrigation purposes, and the marshland is used for cattle grazing. Ramsar site no. 525. Most recent RIS information: 1990.

Wilderness Lakes

Site number: 524 | Country: South Africa | Administrative region: Western Cape

Area: 1,300 ha | Coordinates: 33°59'S 22°41'E | Designation dates: 28-06-1991

[View Site details in RSIS](#)

Wilderness Lakes. 28/06/91; Western Cape; 1,300 ha; 33°59'S 022°39'E. National Park, Wilderness Area, Nature Reserve. A series of three permanent, interconnected coastal lakes linked to the Indian Ocean; includes a dune system with associated thickets, woodlands, marshes, and reedbeds. Important numbers of locally-migrant resident birds as well as staging and breeding birds use the site, which supports 285 native plant species, 32 fish species (several of which use the site as a nursery area), and a diverse marine invertebrate fauna. The lakes provide a major form of flood control. Ramsar site no. 524. Most recent RIS information: 1990.