



# Ramsar Sites Information Service

## Annotated List of Wetlands of International Importance

### Sri Lanka

6 Ramsar Site(s) covering 198,172 ha

#### **Annaiwilundawa Tanks Sanctuary**

Site number: 1,078 | Country: Sri Lanka | Administrative region: North Western Province

Area: 1,397 ha | Coordinates: 07°42'N 79°48'59"E | Designation dates: 03-08-2001

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Annaiwilundawa Tanks Sanctuary. 03/08/01; Northwestern Province; 1,397ha; 07°42'N 079°49'E. Sanctuary. An ancient system of human-made cascading tanks or reservoirs, ranging between 12 and 50 hectares each and totaling some 200 ha, dating back to the 12th century, which help to sustain traditional paddy fields in the area as well as islets of natural vegetation. In addition to being unique to the biogeographical region, the site harbors quite a few species of threatened fish, amphibians, birds, mammals, and especially reptiles and supports up to 40% of the vertebrate species found in Sri Lanka. The system serves as an important refuge for migratory birds and also supports about 50% of the country's freshwater fish species, including at least three endemic species. Only 3-4 meters deep, it is a highly productive wetland with an array of zooplankton and phytoplankton, which also makes it extremely important for migratory fish. The tanks store water, in this dry region, for irrigation purposes, and also play a major role in flood control, aquifer recharge, retention of pollutants and sediments, and nutrient export. Local communities have practiced sustainable traditional farming and fishing since ancient times, but extension of prawn (shrimp) farms in surrounding areas has resulted in mangrove destruction and pollution and eutrophication caused by waste water releases; other potential threats derive from the spread of two species of alien invasive fish and four of plants and from the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in nearby coconut plantations. An upgrade to the status of Nature Reserve, with permanent staff, is foreseen. Ramsar site no. 1078. Most recent RIS information: 2001.

#### **Bundala**

Site number: 487 | Country: Sri Lanka | Administrative region: Southern Province

Area: 6,210 ha | Coordinates: 06°10'N 81°12'E | Designation dates: 15-06-1990

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Bundala. 15/06/90; Southern Province; 6,210 ha; 06°10'N 81°12'E. Flora and Fauna Sanctuary. Four shallow, brackish lagoons and salt pans interconnected by channels with associated marshes, dunes and scrub. It is the most important wintering site in southern Sri Lanka for migratory shorebirds, regularly holding over 15,000 individuals of various species, and provides habitat for rare and threatened waterbird species. Human activities include commercial salt extraction, subsistence fishing, wildlife tourism, livestock grazing, and firewood collection. Ramsar site no. 487. Most recent RIS information: 1990.

## Kumana Wetland Cluster

Site number: 1,931 | Country: Sri Lanka | Administrative region:

Area: 19,011 ha | Coordinates: 06°37'N 81°43'59"E | Designation dates: 29-10-2010

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This Ramsar Site (19,011 ha; 6°37'N 81°44'E) falls within two existing protected areas, Kumana National Park and the Panama-Kudumbigala Sanctuary. Located South-east of Sri Lanka in the Ampara District, this site consists of a diversity of coastal wetland habitats, including lagoons, estuaries, irrigation reservoirs, mangroves, salt marshes, interspersed with sand dune, scrubland and forest vegetation. The site provides excellent feeding and resting habitats for a large number of threatened wetland species, including three turtle species such as the Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*), and the Olive Ridley Turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). Other threatened species include the globally vulnerable Mugger Crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*), bird species like the vulnerable Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilus javanicus*), and mammals such as the endangered Fishing Cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*). The productive coastal wetlands support a thriving near-shore fishery that includes commercially important crustaceans such as *Penaeus* spp., and *Macrobrachium* spp., and also offer refuge for their juvenile stages. Locals engage in lagoon fishing and rice cultivation, and also depend on seasonal non-timber forest products such as Woodapple fruits. The site is famous for its historical values. Around 200 B.C, the area belonged to an ancient irrigation civilization. Caves were occupied by Buddhist monks as far back as the 1st century BC with a few caves being famous for their ancient rock inscriptions and paintings. Threats to the site include disturbance by increasing visitor numbers, increased siltation around lagoons due to cattle grazing while surrounding areas face the problem of illegal logging, poaching and excessive use of chemicals for agriculture. The Department of Wildlife Conservation, under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance of Sri Lanka is directly responsible for managing this diverse and culturally rich wetland.

## Maduganga

Site number: 1,372 | Country: Sri Lanka | Administrative region: Southern Province

Area: 915 ha | Coordinates: 06°18'N 80°03'E | Designation dates: 11-12-2003

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Maduganga. 11/12/03; Southern Province; 915 ha; 06 18'N 080 03'E. A mangrove lagoon joined to the sea by a narrow canal and containing 15 islands of varying size, some of which are inhabited. It is formed of two shallow waterbodies, Maduganga and smaller Randonbe Lake, connected by two narrow channels. On the islands and shores relatively undisturbed mangrove vegetation contains a rich biodiversity qualifying the wetland for 7 Criteria of International Importance. Many globally/nationally endangered, endemic and rare species - e.g. *Shorea affinis*, an endemic and endangered plant, Mugger (*Crocodylus palustris*) vulnerable (IUCN Red Book) and CITES-listed Purple-faced Leaf Monkey (*Trachypithecus vetulus*), endangered, Estuarine Crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*), Flapshell Turtle (*Lissemys punctata*), Indian Python (*Python molurus*) find shelter here. The lagoon provides the breeding, spawning and fattening ground for many fish species and supports 1.2 % of the Little Green Heron biogeographical population. The cultural heritage is very prominent, with numerous ancient temples in the area and on the islands. Maduganga helps in flood control by storing water during monsoon rains and retains nutrient run-off from nearby cinnamon plantations. The major occupation of the local people is fishing and agriculture (cinnamon and coconut). Poaching of wild animals and waterfowl is unfortunately increasing, and extensive use of fertilisers and consequent abundant growth of invasive species, e.g. *Najas marinas* or *Annona glabra*, are factors of concern. Part of a Coastal Resources Management Project funded by the Dutch Government - ADB, with a management plan expected in 2006. Ramsar site no. 1372. Most recent RIS information: 2003.

## Vankalai Sanctuary

Site number: 1,910 | Country: Sri Lanka | Administrative region:

Area: 4,839 ha | Coordinates: 08°55'59"N 79°55'E | Designation dates: 12-07-2010

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Vankalai Sanctuary (8°56'N 079°55'E) is located North-West of Sri Lanka in the District of Mannar. This site covers an area of 4,839 ha and consists of several ecosystems which range from arid-zone thorn scrubland, arid-zone pastures and maritime grasslands, sand dunes, mangroves, salt marshes, lagoons, tidal flats, sea-grass beds and shallow marine areas. Due to the integrated nature of shallow wetland and terrestrial coastal habitats, this sanctuary is highly productive, supporting high ecosystem and species diversity. The site provides excellent feeding and living habitats for a large number of waterbird species, including annual migrants, which also use this area on arrival and during their exit from Sri Lanka. It harbours more than 20,000 waterbirds in a given year, including the Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) and the Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas Penelope*), of which Vankalai Sanctuary supports 1% of the population of the latter two species. The site's coastal and marine ecosystems are important for over 60 species of fish, marine turtles, and rare species such as Dugongs (*Dugong dugon*). These ecosystems provide important spawning and feeding grounds for juvenile fish species such as Trevally (*Caranx* spp.), Snappers (*Lutjanus* spp.), and also host a number of threatened species, such as the Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Dugongs (*Dugong dugon*), and Saltwater Crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*). Vankalai Sanctuary sustains diverse food chains, while also sustaining the livelihoods of fisheries-dependent communities in the area. Civil unrest has kept human activity out of this region for nearly two decades, hence there are only few permanent settlements in the area. Locals engage in small-scale livestock grazing, subsistence and commercial fishing. Part of the Vankalai Sanctuary is an archaeological site since it is partly located in the major port of ancient Sri Lanka, dated from 6th century BC to 13th century AD. The Department of Conservation is directly responsible for managing this diverse and culturally rich wetland.

## Wilpattu Ramsar Wetland Cluster

Site number: 2,095 | Country: Sri Lanka | Administrative region: North Western and North Central Provinces

Area: 165,800 ha | Coordinates: 08°32'26"N 80°10'E | Designation dates: 02-02-2013

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Wilpattu Ramsar Wetland Cluster. 02/02/2013; North Western, North Central provinces; 165,800 ha; 08°32'27"N 080°10'01"E. National Park. The site encompasses all of Wilpattu National Park (Willu-pattu meaning 'Land of Lakes'), declared in 1938. Some 205 water bodies, both natural and manmade, were identified within the boundary of the park. A unique feature is the numerous 'villus' which are natural, sand-rimmed water basins ranging between 10 to 160 hectares that are filled with rainwater. The varying salt content of the villus offer an ideal habitat for a wide range of resident and migrant wildlife species, including the endangered Asia Elephant *Elephas maximus*, the vulnerable Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*) and the vulnerable freshwater crocodile *Crocodylus palustris*. Seagrass beds, mangroves, salt marshes, swamps and floodplain forests are also found and contribute to the area's rich biodiversity. Twenty-one endemic species of vertebrates have been recorded at the site, including the endangered Sri Lankan Leopard (*Panthera pardus* ssp. *Kotiya*) and the Ceylon Swallow (*Hirundo hyperythra*). The site once supported a thriving agricultural civilization, demonstrated by its 68 archaeologically important sites. Currently, communities in the southeastern and western areas rely on commercial and subsistence fisheries, while those in other areas depend upon agriculture. Invasive aquatic species, logging, slash and burn agriculture threaten the site. Ramsar Site no. 2095. Most recent RIS information: 2013.