

Camargue //



RAMSAR
SITE NUMBER
346



FRANCE

Area :
100 788 ha

Date of designation :
December 1st 1986

Coordinates :
43° 30'N 04° 30'E

Summary

The Camargue, a vast deltaic wetland, covers the entire territory of the Camargue Regional Nature Park located between the two arms of the Rhone delta and extending to the border of the Crau to the east. Bordered on the south by the Mediterranean Sea and having for summit the defluence of the river in Arles.

The territory is characterized by large expanses of lagoons, marshes, ponds, made up of fresh water, sometimes brackish to very salty. The coastal line of more than 70 km is a low sandy coast constantly reworked by the winds and marine currents.

International importance

The Camargue is a site of international importance for the number and diversity of bird species that live there.

It is also a major migratory stopover between the African and European continents. It regularly hosts the only breeding colony of pink flamingo in France.

The flora is made up of species characteristic of environments with variable salinity and flooding and forms on very large areas of more than 1,000 ha particular steppe landscapes called "sansouire".

General location

Located at the mouths of the Grand and Petit Rhone in the Mediterranean, the Camargue occupies the northern coastline of the Gulf of Lion.

The dynamic urban centers of Montpellier-Nîmes to the west, Arles-Avignon to the north and Aix-Marseille to the east surround it within a 70 km perimeter.



Services provided by wetlands

Some wetlands of the Camargue delta are the support of the extensive breeding of bulls and horses of rustic local races.

Traditional fishing for eel and atherin is practiced regularly in various ponds. Sea salt is produced in the coastal lagoons.

Ponds, marshes and lagoons are also receptacles for the overflow of water from the Rhone and the Mediterranean Sea, thus reducing the risk of flooding in inhabited areas.



Adverse factors

Water contamination by pesticides is a permanent concern at the site level.

In addition, there is a risk of trivialization of the environments by the impoundment of temporary ponds and marshes with fresh water from the Rhone, at times when they tend to dry out naturally.

Finally, the development of invasive species disturbs and modifies the wetlands.



Four species representative of the site



GREATER FLAMINGO
(*Phoenicopterus roseus*)

The greater flamingo is a gregarious species that regularly frequents the Camargue. It owes its name to its pale to intense pink plumage on the edge of its wings. It breeds in the spring in the vast lagoons located south of the Rhone delta, the pond of Fangassier offering him since the 1960s an island for laying eggs and raising chicks.



EUROPEAN POND TERRAPIN
(*Emys orbicularis*)

The European pond terrapin lives in marshes, canals and ditches which constitute a privileged habitat for the species. Discreet, it is however visible in spring from the first heat. The Camargue is home to the largest population of the French Mediterranean.



PHOENICEAN JUNIPER
(*Juniperus phoenicea*)

The Phoenician juniper is a small tree that grows on coastal or fossil dunes. It forms dense thickets on islands surrounded by water. Its age-old presence in the heart of the Camargue National Nature Reserve has made the mythical Bois des Rièges famous.



SWAMP SAWGRASS
(*Cladium mariscus*)

The swamp sawgrass is an emergent aquatic plant which in the Camargue develops on the left bank of the Grand Rhône and forms homogeneous groups of several hundred hectares. This presence in such a large area is an originality on the scale of the French Mediterranean. It is due to the resurgences coming from the underground water table of the Crau.

Biodiversity

Due to the diversity of wetlands present in the Rhone delta, the natural environments are home to many species both terrestrial and aquatic.

Among these 72 plants are on the list of heritage species. Nearly three hundred species of birds, i.e. 75% of the species recorded in France, live in the Camargue. A significant number of them are protected at the regional, national and international levels. Aquatic insects (38 species of "dragonflies"), crustaceans (23 species), fish (47), amphibians (12), reptiles (14) and mammals (43) complete this diversity.



Management and conservation

Conservation measures are illustrated by the existence of three reserves : the Camargue National Nature Reserve, the Vigueirat National Nature Reserve and the Tour du Valat Regional Nature Reserve.

The land acquired by the Conservatoire du littoral and the Bouches du Rhône department (more than 20,000 ha) contributes to enriching the protection measures in the natural wetlands.

The charter of the Camargue Regional Nature Park is the strategic management document and covers the entire Ramsar site. It was first established in 1970 and has been renewed twice. The last renewal was in February 2011.

It is determined that the park's charter and governance body are also consistent with the management need of the Ramsar site.



The Ramsar Convention

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, commonly known as the Ramsar Convention, is a global inter-governmental treaty that provides the frame-work for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. It is the only global treaty to focus on one single ecosystem.