

Étangs de la Champagne humide //



RAMSAR SITE NUMBER
514



FRANCE

Area :
255 800 ha

Date of designation :
April 8th 1991

Coordinates :
48° 35' N 04° 45' E

Summary

It is the largest Ramsar site in mainland France. The natural region called "Champagne humide" takes its place on a clay soil (with only a few sandy, marly or calcareous levels). The clays absorb water and keep it within them, hence the presence of many aquatic and wetland environments. Water is present everywhere, giving rhythm to the landscapes and human activities, with a diversity of environments like ponds (more than 400), forests, wet meadows, rivers and gravel pits.

Three reservoir lakes are present: the Der-Chantecoq lake (impounded in 1974), the Orient lake (1966) and the Aube reservoir lake (Temple and Amance lakes, 1990).

International importance

The site has been designated as a Ramsar site in particular as a habitat for migratory and wintering birdlife. Beyond the birds, its interest is recognized for its natural heritage habitats. Many plant and animal species characteristic of wetlands and aquatic environments live there.

General location

The site is located in the Grand-Est region, 180 km east of Paris. It is spread over 228 communes in three departments (Aube, Marne and Haute-Marne). It extends from the Argonne (in the north) to the territory of the Regional Natural Park of the Forêt d'Orient (in the southwest), passing through the Pays du Der.



Adverse factors

The turning over of the meadows, accompanied by drainage (numerous since the beginning of the 1990s), is one of the major threats to the Ramsar site. Development projects (economic, urban, tourist) can have a strong impact, which is why they must be thought out taking into account the aquatic and wetland environments.

The degradation of natural environments (pollution, disruption of ecological continuity, etc.) is added to these risks of direct destruction. The intensive management practices of the environments are harmful to the fauna and flora of the Ramsar site. In the case of the ponds in particular, this concerns the disappearance of the traditional practice of dry land, the introduction of invasive species, etc.

Services provided by wetlands

Most of the ponds were created in the Middle Ages by monks for fish farming, agriculture and watering animals. Today they are mainly devoted to recreation, fishing and hunting. The meadows and forests are mainly used for livestock and forestry. The site plays an important socio-economic and recreational role: beaches along the lakes, bicycle paths, hiking trails, recreational lakes, etc. In addition to their ecological interest, the three artificial lakes aim to reduce floods and support the low water levels of the Marne, Seine and Aube basins.



Four species representative of the site



COMMON REED
(*Phragmites australis*)

The common reed is one of the emblematic species of the reedbeds that surround the ponds and lakes. These environments are the breeding ground for many species of birds which constitute one of the riches of the Ramsar site.



EURASIAN CRANE
(*Grus grus*)

The Ramsar site is located in a migration corridor for the Eurasian crane (up to 300,000 individuals). The species is also present for wintering (20,000 to 30,000 cranes at the Lac du Der-Chantecoq). A festive and playful event is even dedicated to it since 2007: the Crane Festival!



AMUR BITTERLING
(*Rhodeus sericeus*)

Present in a large part of the ponds, it is one of the heritage species of the Ramsar site. It is also found in lakes and rivers. It is the only known European fish whose reproduction depends on the presence of bivalve shells.



YELLOW-BELLIED TOAD
(*Bombina variegata*)

Dependent on the vast forests of the Ramsar site, the yellow-bellied toad is found in ruts and sunny puddles. Its distribution and ecological requirements have been specified thanks to the action program for the amphibians of Champagne-Ardenne.



Management and conservation

Biodiversity

The site is home to an abundance of wildlife. The presence of lakes and ponds makes it an essential stopover for the wintering of nearly 150,000 water birds: Bewick's swans, whistling ducks and greylag geese can be counted in the hundreds, even thousands. The site is very popular for migration, especially for the black stork (nearly 150 individuals at the stopover in summer) and the very famous grey crane (up to 300,000 individuals in migration). This site, unique in the Grand-Est, is home to nine species of nesting herons, including the Little Bittern and the Purple Heron, as well as large populations of Eurasian reed warbler. In addition to the birds, the diversity of habitats (wet meadows, reedbeds, flooded mudflats, alluvial forests, etc.) makes the site particularly interesting for numerous plant species (pulicaria vulgaris, greater spearwort, bladderworts, etc.) and wildlife (large copper, large marsh grasshopper, yellow-bellied toad, water shrew, amur bitterling, thick shelled river mussel, etc.).

Since its designation as a Ramsar site in 1991, many protected areas have been created. The Ramsar site currently includes seven nature reserves: two national nature reserves, one national hunting and wildlife reserve and four regional nature reserves. Five of the eight prefectural decrees for the protection of biotopes in the area complete the protection of wetlands within the Ramsar site. One regional nature park is included in the Ramsar perimeter, that of the Forêt d'Orient, with a total area of 82,000 ha. Several Natura 2000 sites have been designated for birds (special protection areas), habitats and species (special areas of conservation). They cover nearly 58,000 hectares of the site, or 22.6% of the site's surface. Many partners are involved in the Ramsar site in favor of wetlands: Conservatory of natural spaces of Champagne-Ardenne, Regional Natural Park of the Forêt d'Orient, Conservatory of the Littoral, Public Territorial Establishment of the Seine Grands Lacs basin, French Office for biodiversity, League for the Protection of Birds Champagne-Ardenne, Permanent Center of Initiatives for the Environment Pays de Soulaïnes, etc.



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.