

# Étangs de la Petite Woëvre //



RAMSAR  
SITE NUMBER  
**515**



FRANCE

Area :  
**5 993 ha**

Date of designation :  
**April 8<sup>th</sup> 1991**

Coordinates :  
**49°02'N 05°48'E**

## Summary

The depression of the Woëvre is made up of clay and marl on which the ponds of the Petite Woëvre were created by the monks as early as the Middle Ages in order to purify the swamps and to produce fish. The numerous ponds and pools are intertwined with forests, pastures, wet meadows, reed beds and cultivated land. A wide variety of birds frequent the site throughout the year for breeding, migration and wintering. In the heart of this humid plain dominated by the cuesta relief of the Meuse coasts, the great pond of Lachaussée and its 325 ha of water is a jewel representative of the biodiversity and human activities of the Woëvre.

## International importance

This site is listed as a wetland of international importance because of the large number of bird species classified as "vulnerable" as well as rare mammals, amphibians, plants and insects. It is a major staging area for sandhill cranes, anatidae and shorebirds and a breeding ground for paludicolous passerines and ardeids.

## General location

The Woëvre ponds are located in the Regional Natural Park of Lorraine, in the North-East of France, 30 km west of the city of Metz.



Étangs  
de la Petite Woëvre

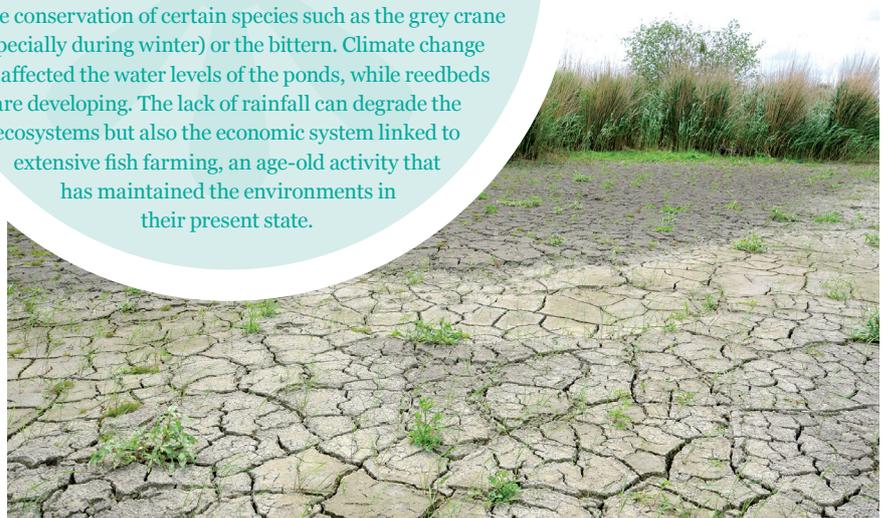
## Adverse factors

The main threat to the site and its surroundings is the cultivation of grasslands and the intensification of agricultural practices. Drainage leads to the disappearance of wet meadows and the species linked to this habitat. The leaching of fertilizers and pesticides is promoted, which leads to a degradation of the water quality. The loss of tranquility of the site represents another threat because the tranquility is essential for the conservation of certain species such as the grey crane (especially during winter) or the bittern. Climate change has affected the water levels of the ponds, while reedbeds are developing. The lack of rainfall can degrade the ecosystems but also the economic system linked to extensive fish farming, an age-old activity that has maintained the environments in their present state.

## Services provided by wetlands

From a hydrological point of view, the site is upstream of the Yron watershed and therefore serves as a water reservoir for this river, in particular for flood control and low-water flow support.

In addition to the services of water purification, climatic benefits and contribution in biodiversity and thus in quality of life, the water points of the site provide economic benefits related to the fish farming activity (and the related restoration), to the hunting activity, to the agricultural activity, to the educational activity (discovery circuit, school animation and general public during the Fish Festival...) and to the tourist activity (lodgings, restaurant, theater...). Obviously, these meadows, ponds and pools are the place of life of thousands of animal and plant species.



## Four species representative of the site

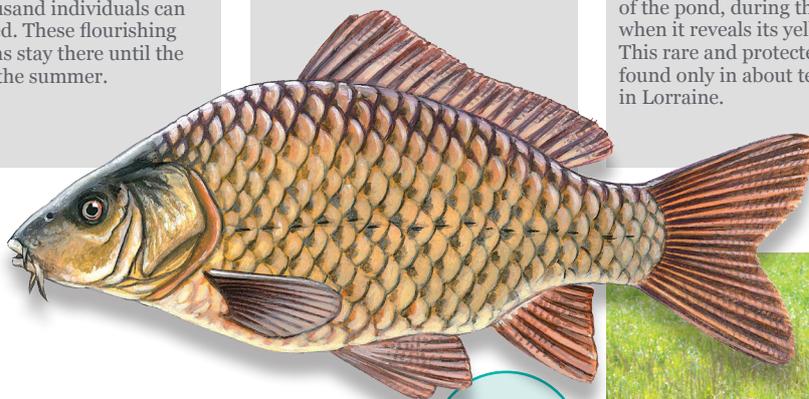


**COMMON CRANE**  
(*Grus grus*)

The Woëvre Ramsar site is one of the most important regional stopovers for the common crane during its migrations, where up to ten thousand individuals can be observed. These flourishing populations stay there until the middle of the summer.

**EURASIAN CARP**  
(*Carpus carpio*)

The Eurasian carp has always been a choice fish in traditional fish ponds in Lorraine. By itself, it often makes up nearly 30% of the fish in the pond. The Lorraine carp, introduced as early as the 13th century, would have been used to populate the Fontainebleau ponds.



**FEN RAGWORT**  
(*Jacobaea paludosa*)

If this large species of ragwort (1,5 m) is distributed in all the reedbeds of the big pond, it is particularly visible from the dike of the pond, during the summer, when it reveals its yellow capitals. This rare and protected species is found only in about ten wetlands in Lorraine.



**EURASIAN BITTERN**  
(*Botaurus stellaris*)

The Ramsar site of the Petite Woëvre ponds is a bastion for the last breeding populations of Eurasian bittern in Lorraine. It is a very discreet bird except when it sings. There are barely half a dozen singing males spread out over the hundred or so hectares of reed beds on the main site.

## Management and conservation



The large pond has been used for fish farming since its creation in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The state forest, subject to a forest management plan, is added to the communal and private woods belonging to the Conservatoire d'espaces naturels de Lorraine and the Association des paralysés de France to include in their management elements of protection.

The site is in the Natura 2000 zone with a document of objectives validated in 2012, led by the Regional Nature Park of Lorraine. It allows to act on the preservation of agricultural areas (meadows or crops). The whole area is also classified and its heart is protected as a regional nature reserve since 2009. The objective of these protections is to reconcile human activities and biodiversity, to channel the frequentation by the general public while enhancing the discovery of environments.



## Biodiversity

183 bird species have been identified on the site. The Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*), the Common Crane (*Porzana parva*) and the Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) breed there. Amphibians are represented by the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and the green tree frog (*Hyla arborea*); aquatic insects by the broad-tailed leucorrhine (*Leucorrhinia caudalis*).

We can also see the wild cat (*Felis silvestris*), the vespertilion with eared slits (*Myotis emarginatus*), the barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*), the great murin (*Myotis myotis*) for chiropterans, the copper of the marshes (*Lycena dispar*) and the checkerboard of the succise (*Euphydryas aurinia*) for the lepidopterans.



### 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.