

La Baie de Somme //



RAMSAR SITE NUMBER
925



FRANCE

Area :
19 043 ha

Date of designation :
January 23rd 1998

Coordinates :
50° 13' N 01° 16' E

Summary

Somme bay Ramsar site includes two sub-sites: the littoral zone and the backwaters.

The combination of the geomorphological context and the ancient action of Man who, by means of dykes, has extended the terrestrial domain to the detriment of the marine environment, determines a considerable variety of environments.

Mudflats, white and grey dunes, peaty marshes, reedbeds, meadows and humid bocage, ponds and ditches, artificial water bodies resulting from the exploitation of aggregates, etc. follow one another.

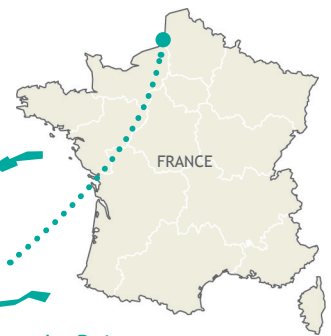
International importance

Several vulnerable species at the European level have been recorded as parking, wintering or breeding, including the Eurasian spoonbill, the Eurasian bittern and the pied avocet. The site is home to the largest colony of common seals in France and a growing number of grey seals.

It is also a nursery area for sea bass and various other fish species; it is also very important for elvers (young eels). The site is home to nearly 400 rare and/or endangered plant species.

General location

This Ramsar site is located in Hauts-de-France (formerly Picardie), in the department of Somme.



La Baie de Somme

Services provided by wetlands

The landscapes and the natural character of the site attract many tourists every year. Nature tourism complements the services historically provided by the local wetlands: breeding, fishing on board or on foot, mussel farming. The Somme estuary is considered as an open-air factory where the multiple natural productions of shellfish, shrimps and marine plants are the basis of supply services that support hundreds of inhabitants. Hunting is also widely practiced and has helped maintain many wetlands.



Adverse factors

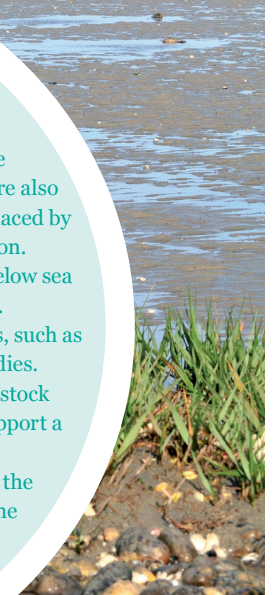
The inevitable silting up of the estuary modifies the ecological balance. The mudflats disappear (and therefore also the invertebrates that the shorebirds feed on) and are replaced by unproductive sandy areas or by salt meadow vegetation.

Rising sea levels may lead to submergence of land often below sea level, which could greatly alter current ecosystems.

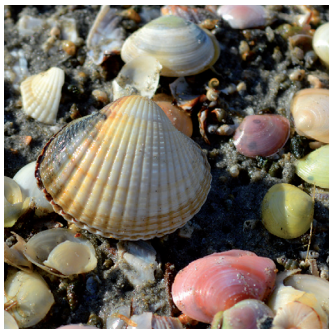
Freshwater marshes are under threat from invasive species, such as Helms' cress, which clogs ponds and shallow water bodies.

The difficulties experienced for several years by the livestock industry has led to a decrease in wet meadows, which support a remarkable biodiversity.

The frequentation of Somme bay exerts a pressure on the natural environments, which led to the labeling of the site as a "Grand Site de France", practically on the same surface as the Ramsar site.



Four species representative of the site



COMMON COCKLE
(*Cerastoderma edule*)

The common cockle lives in the tidal zone, buried under the surface of the mud and sand. Only the siphons emerge at high tide to filter the water and retain plankton from the sea water. The cockle has an undeniable economic importance, collected by about 250 professional fishermen, but is also the basis of the feeding of the oystercatcher for which the Somme estuary is a major wintering site in France.



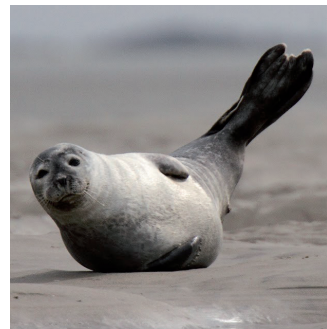
PIED AVOCET
(*Recurvirostra avosetta*)

The pied avocet has been nesting in the Somme bay for forty years and its initial population, limited to the Marquenterre ornithological park, has broken up into different sub-populations present in protected areas of the site as well as in areas that do not benefit from any measures. It is the umbrella species on which the management measures of the environments are focused in order to benefit all the species of shorebirds and larids breeding in coastal areas.



FEN ORCHID
(*Liparis loeselii*)

This small and very discreet fen orchid is one of the rarest species of orchids in Europe, which is why it is listed as a protected species and is subject to conservation measures. Its abundance in the Somme bay is variable, depending on the year, without it being possible to define the elements that condition its appearance.



COMMON SEAL
(*Phoca vitulina*)

This marine mammal finds on the sandbanks of the estuary the right conditions to stay and in the waters of the Channel the fish that are the basis of its diet. Protected and monitored, it now has a flourishing population that has no predators. It has supplanted birds in nature tourism and many visitors to the Bay of the Somme consider their stay unsuccessful if they have not observed at least one seal.

Biodiversity

Great mosaic of environments allows the existence of a remarkable biological diversity. Many sensitive species find refuge on this site, which constitutes for some of them their stronghold at the regional or even national level. The exceptional character of the site is reflected by the ornithological richness which reaches approximately 370 species counted during the last two centuries on the whole of the Picardy maritime plain.

33 generic habitats falling under the Habitats, Fauna and Flora Directive are present in the Ramsar area, five of which are of priority community interest.



Management and conservation

The site is rich in administrative conservation measures: a national nature reserve, a regional nature reserve, six hunting reserves, three biotope protection decrees, two classified sites, two registered sites, a natural marine park, a regional natural park in the process of being created, two special conservation areas (Habitats Directive), two special protection areas (Birds Directive), several hundred hectares acquired by the Conservatoire du littoral, and a few dozen hectares acquired by the Office national de la chasse et de la faune sauvage.

The management of the sites is essentially ensured by the Syndicat mixte Baie de Somme - Grand Littoral Picard, and on lesser surfaces, by the Conservatoire d'espaces naturels de Picardie and the Fédération départementale des chasseurs de la Somme.

Management is made possible by financial contributions from the European Union, the State, the Artois-Picardy Water Agency, the Hauts-de-France Region and the Somme Department. A wetlands unit has been set up by the aforementioned Syndicat mixte to facilitate the application of the Ramsar management plan and to animate a dynamic favorable to the conservation of wetlands.



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.