

# Étangs littoraux de la Narbonnaise //



RAMSAR SITE  
NUMBER  
**1593**



Area :  
**12 330 ha**

Date of designation :  
**February 12<sup>th</sup> 2006**

Coordinates :  
**43° 09' N 03° 03' E**

## Summary

The site brings together a group of five Mediterranean lagoons on the Aude coast, connected to the sea by four graus, including those of Ayrolle and La Palme, among the last natural graus on the French Mediterranean coast.

The site is characterized by a great diversity of peripheral environments (reedbeds, jonchaies, sansouïres, salted steppes, etc.) hosting more than 300 species of birds, but also under water, vast expanses of lagoon grass beds. A lido, 27 km long, separates the lagoon system from the sea. It is made up of largely intact sandy stretches punctuated by small dune masses. The presence of several high rocky islands gives the landscapes of the coastal ponds of the Narbonnaise a unique character.

## Internationale importance

The littoral ponds of the Aude have no similarity in France and few equivalents in Europe, in particular by :

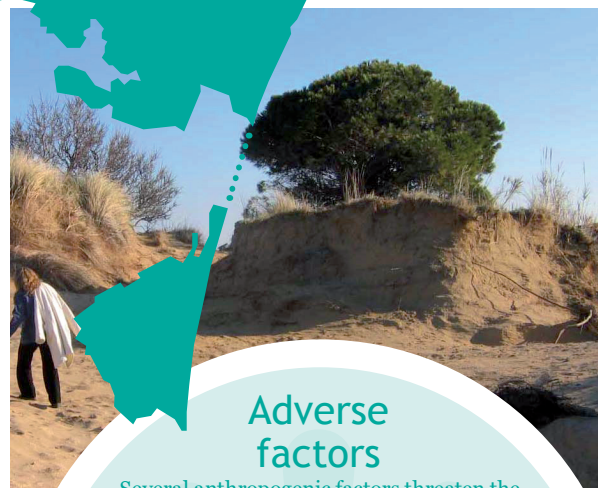
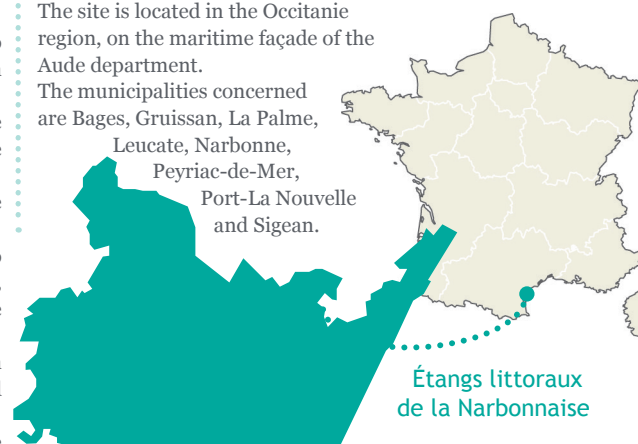
- the fact that the pond of Ayrolle and the pond of La Palme communicate with the sea each by a natural grau;
- the presence of salty steppes remarkable for their floristic richness;
- a great diversity of environments due to the varied nature of the substrates (sands, mudflats, shellfish debris, etc.), to the important salinity gradients;
- the presence of ancestral human activities (active salt pans, wetland grazing, professional fishing);
- the presence of limestone islands in the heart of the ponds;
- a small saltwater pond (the Dou) set in the heart of limestone hills constituting a micro-catchment area with no watercourse;
- the pond of La Palme, reference lagoon of the WFD for its good ecological status.

## General location

The site is located in the Occitanie region, on the maritime façade of the Aude department.

The municipalities concerned are Bages, Gruissan, La Palme,

Leucate, Narbonne, Peyriac-de-Mer, Port-La Nouvelle and Sigean.



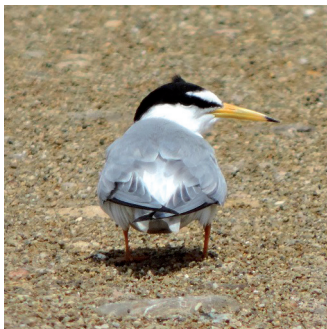
## Services provided by wetlands

The 12,330 ha of wetlands on the site constitute a vast flood expansion zone. They thus contribute to the protection against floods of the riparian communities. The self-purifying capacity of the lagoon environment and the peripheral wetlands (in particular the reed beds) is favored by a high rate of sunshine and the frequency of violent winds. Professional fishing is well present in the lagoons. The salt marshes have been put back into production on the coast, while others have been developed to preserve biodiversity. Some sectors of salt meadows are grazed. The lagoons also host many recreational activities related to wind and water sports and the lidos of many tourists in the summer on the beaches.

## Adverse factors

Several anthropogenic factors threaten the quality of the site: uncontrolled frequentation of the lidos and marshes, and even of certain ponds (kitesurfing, etc.), is the cause of degradation, disturbance and conflicts of use. Water quality is also an important issue for the balance of aquatic ecosystems. Finally, the decrease in freshwater inflow and the rise in sea level lead to a salinization of lagoons and peripheral marshes (regression of reed beds). The evolution of lagoon complexes in this context of climate change is poorly known, and must be studied in order to consider adaptations.

## Four species representative of the site



**LITTLE TERN**  
(*Sterna albifrons*)

The little tern can be identified by its small size. Its tail is short and agitated of jerky movements. The forehead is white, and the beak is yellow with black tip. Its legs are yellow.

The diversity of environments allows its nesting which finds favorable bare areas on the lido or on the edges of ponds (up to 10% of national numbers).



**GREATER FLAMINGO**  
(*Phoenicopterus roseus*)

Emblematic species of the south of France, the greater flamingo is recognizable by its color of course, but also by its long webbed legs, and a short and curved beak, with black tip. Some years, several thousands of individuals are counted there. This strong attraction for the ponds of Narbonnais is explained above all by the very great trophic richness of these water bodies which provides them with a substantial food.



**EUROPEAN EEL**  
(*Anguilla anguilla*)

This fish measures from 40 to 150 cm and can reach 4 kg. For this migratory amphibian (which will pass during its life in different environments, fresh water and salt water), the ponds of the Narbonnaise constitute a welcome site thanks to the presence of vast grass beds and a great diversity of environments. The eel is present in all the ponds of the Narbonnaise, at different stages of its evolution: elver, yellow and silver.



**SEA LAVENDER STATICE**  
(*Limoniastrum monopetalum*)

Also called sea lavender, the big statice measures from 50 cm to 130 cm and has green persistent leaves. Its flowers are mauve and arranged in spikes. The salty steppes of the Narbonnaise region are home to the only French stations of *Limoniastrum monopetalum*. It is accompanied by nearly twenty other species of *Limonium*, which makes the site the "Paradise of statice".



## Biodiversity

The site is a nesting ground for a large number of water birds, but not only. The reliefs and the dry environments of the site also welcome species such as the great horned owl. The Bonelli's eagle likes certain sectors to hunt. The site is also a migratory stopover and a wintering site of international importance. The ponds are very productive in terms of fish and are ideal for the growth of fry during the spring. A few species classified as vulnerable have been identified, such as the seahorse. The plants are as diversified as the environments they occupy. With nearly fifteen natural habitats of community interest, including priority coastal lagoons, salt marshes, temporary pools, dry grasslands, the site has a strong importance in their conservation.



### 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.



## Management and conservation

The Ramsar site is entirely included in the territory of the Narbonnaise en Méditerranée Regional Nature Park, of which it constitutes the heart. It is also classified as a Natura 2000 site, ENS, SPA and ZNIEFF. The site is mostly public (public maritime domain or Conservatoire du littoral). It is also partially covered by the SAGE (Water Development and Management Plan) of the Lower Aude Valley. Finally, the Robine canal is a classified site, listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

The management and conservation actions are of several types :

- territorial animation (contract for the ponds of Narbonnaise until 2010, Natura 2000, etc.);
- scientific monitoring ;
- direct management of the lands of the Conservatoire du littoral ;
- awareness raising for the general public and schools in a classroom equipped for the discovery of wetlands called "Ramsar class";
- publication of guides for residents ("Gardening without pesticides", "Useful plants in the garden").

