

Les Étangs de Villepey //



RAMSAR SITE
NUMBER
1836



Area :
255 ha

Date of designation :
September 15th 2008

Coordinates :
43° 24'N 06° 43'E

Summary

The Ramsar site of the Etangs de Villepey covers an area of 255 ha and is an exception on the highly urbanized coastline of the French Riviera. The site includes diversified natural environments (lagoon, reed bed, riparian, dune cordon), populated by an exceptional fauna and flora heritage. However, some habitats have been created or reworked by human activities (former gravel pits, sandpits, cultivated or grazed sectors). Today, this protected natural area constitutes, with the Salins d'Hyères, one of the rare coastal wetlands between the Camargue and the Italian border.

International importance

The site is home to one of the last Mediterranean lagoons on the coast between the Camargue and the Alpes-Maritimes. Numerous habitats linked to wetlands are represented on the site (mudflats, reedbeds, ponds, riparian forests). The site is the main station for all the plant formations typical of salty wetlands found east of the Rhone and therefore represents a remarkable landscape at the departmental level. The site is home to several species of chiropterans, a population of European pond terrapins and numerous insects. It is also home to a wide variety of birds, some of which are endangered and of great heritage interest.

General location

The site is located on the Var coast. Nestled in the heart of the Gulf of Frejus and the lower Argens valley, they border the Petite Maures massif. In the immediate vicinity of the Saint-Aygulf district, they are surrounded by the sea, the Argens river and the departmental road.



Les Étangs de Villepey

Services provided by wetlands

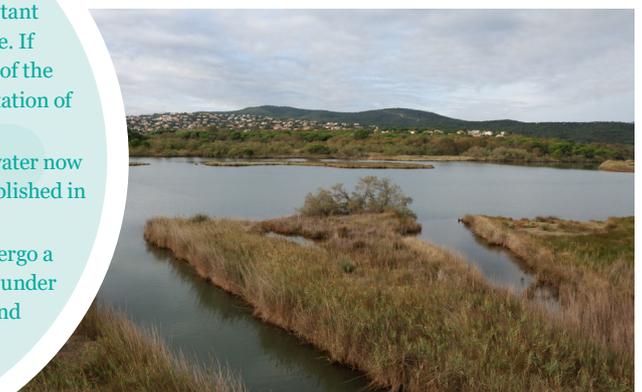
Traditional and environmentally friendly agricultural activities still exist on the site. The management and conservation of the open environments (meadows, fields...) are carried out mainly thanks to the grazing from sheep. The exploitation of the Cane of Provence is authorized for an associative structure, hosted on the site, in order to manufacture canisses (privacy screens). Recreational activities are numerous: naturalist observations, ornithology, walking, jogging, cycling, etc. Fishing and hunting are regularly practiced during the authorized seasons. Naturalist activities (discovery of the site) are regularly organized, notably during the World Wetlands Day, the Fête de la nature and the European Heritage Days.

Adverse factors

Human intervention has played an important role in the landscape formation of the site. If the lagoon is of natural origin, a large part of the water bodies are the result of the past exploitation of gravel pits.

A fauna and flora adapted to the presence of water now flourish on the site of a municipal landfill established in the 70s and 80s.

Places of multiple practices, the ponds undergo a strong pressure: from the local population, under the effect of the demographic growth, and from the visitors during the tourist season, which lengthens.



Four species representative of the site



EUROPEAN POND TERRAPIN
(*Emys orbicularis*)

The European pond terrapin is a species of turtle protected in France, which is fond of freshwater aquatic environments such as ponds, ponds and lentic streams.

Omnivorous, it feeds on small fish, plants, algae and aquatic micro-organisms (insects, crustaceans).

It participates in the recycling of matter by consuming animal corpses.



GREAT REED WARBLER
(*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*)

It is great reed warbler which lives only in wetlands, where develops its habitat of predilection: the reedbed.

It is a migratory species that returns to the site in the spring to breed in the "reeds" that it particularly appreciates.

Its diet is strictly insectivorous.



LITTLE BITTERN
(*Ixobrychus minutus*)

Also migratory, this small heron of the ardeidae family returns in the spring to breed in the vegetation on the edge of ponds.

It feeds on small fish, insects and crustaceans that it catches by lying in wait on the vegetation overhanging the water.

Discreet and mimetic with the environment that surrounds it, it is relatively difficult to observe it in the open.



TIGER BEETLE
(*Cylindera paludosa*)

This insect is found only in a very rare habitat at the European scale: the Mediterranean lagoon. Present in the site, it likes the open salted environments with low vegetation such as the sansouïres.

This predator moves quickly on the ground in search of prey and flies away at the slightest disturbance to land, a few meters away, on the ground or in the shelter of the vegetation.



Management and conservation

The Ramsar site is a remarkable environment of great ecological interest. Located in the heart of a major tourist center, it was threatened by the advance of urbanization and is subject to increasing frequentation. Its protection being directly linked to the control of the land, the Conservatoire du Littoral acquired the 255 ha of the site between 1980 and 2005 by engaging a procedure of Declaration of Public Utility.

A sanctuary zone has been created in the heart of the site to limit the penetration and disturbance by the public within the natural environment.

The wild boar population is regulated by beats which take place, at the request of the coastal guards, only on Thursdays in order to allow the discovery of the site by the public the rest of the time.

The current management, in accordance with the management plan of the site is ensured by the Community of agglomeration Var Estere Méditerranée (CAVEM).



Biodiversity

The site is characterized by landscapes of a "natural" character (lagoon environment, dune cordon, sansouïre, woodlands), and by landscapes more marked by human activities (agricultural plots, constructions, discovery facilities). About twenty natural habitats are present on the site and four main groups of vegetation are identified: coastal environments, halophilic environments, non-halophilic wetlands and dry land environments, to which we must add the lagoon.

7 plant species protected at the national level and 14 at the regional level have been identified, 3 of which are on the red list of threatened flora in France. In total, 27 heritage species have been identified on site.

As for the fauna, more than 260 species of birds have been observed on the site. We can also note the presence of a population of European Cistude and a dozen species of bats.



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.