

# Île Europa //



RAMSAR SITE  
NUMBER  
**2073**

Area :  
**205 800 ha**

Date of designation:  
**October 27<sup>th</sup> 2011**

Coordinates :  
**22°21'S 40°21'E**

## Summary

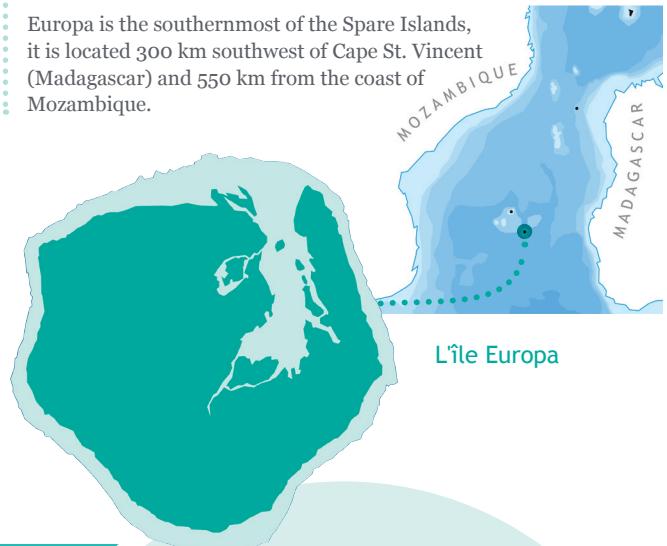
Europa Island is part, along with Juan-de-Nova, Glorieuses, Bassas-da-India and Tromelin, of the Spars Islands of the Indian Ocean. These five islands constitute since 2007 the fifth district of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands (TAAF), an overseas collectivity administered by a prefect, senior administrator. Europa Island is a large atoll of volcanic origin, 6 to 7 km in diameter, with a land area of about 28 km<sup>2</sup> and 47 km<sup>2</sup> of reef area.

## International importance

The natural marine and terrestrial habitats, including the mangrove of Europa, which covers more than 700 ha, are in an exceptional state of conservation and have earned the site its classification under the Ramsar Convention. With more than 800,000 pairs of breeding seabirds, Europa is home to nearly a quarter of the number of seabirds recorded in the Mozambique Channel. The island is also home to many endangered or endemic heritage species.

## General location

Europa is the southernmost of the Spars Islands, it is located 300 km southwest of Cape St. Vincent (Madagascar) and 550 km from the coast of Mozambique.



## Services provided by wetlands

On Indian Ocean scale, Europa is a real reservoir of biodiversity.

Many rare and threatened species carry out all or part of their life cycle there (feeding, reproduction, resting). Europa is home to population nuclei of species from which individuals disperse (seabirds, sea turtles, fish, corals...). The favorable environmental conditions also allow the reception of new populations of species.

Europa is considered by the scientific community as a unique open-air laboratory for the study of the natural evolution of island ecosystems and global changes.

The presence of invasive alien species is the main direct threat to island environments.



## Adverse factors

The presence of rats (*Rattus rattus*) threatens in the short or medium term the populations of marine birds and terrestrial reptiles of Europa.

The invasion by the choca (*Furcraea foetida*), a plant species native to South America, also disturbs the natural ecosystems of the island and the associated animal species.

The island of Europa, like all island environments, is also threatened by global changes (rise in ocean temperature and sea level, ocean acidification, increase in the frequency of cyclones, etc.) which pose a major risk to the marine species that depend on the island's waters.

## Four species representative of the site



**WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD**  
(*Phaethon lepturus europae*)

Europa's yellow-tailed tropicbird is a subspecies endemic to the island. 800 to 1,000 pairs breed on the island throughout the year. The species which nests on the ground is threatened by the presence of the rat which preda



**GREEN TURTLE**  
(*Chelonia mydas*)

Europa is the most important nesting site for green turtles in the Indian Ocean. Each year, between 2,000 and 11,000 turtles come to lay eggs on the sandy beaches of the island.



**EUPHORBIA**  
(*Euphorbia stenoclada*)

The euphorbia forest (euphorbaie) covers more than 600 ha. It shelters several colonies of sea birds and the two endemic species of reptiles of the island. The entomological diversity is very high and the majority of the 43 native plant species can be observed there.



**SPOTTED LABIALS SKINK**  
(*Trachylepis maculilabris infralineata*)

The spotted labials skink is an endemic reptile of Europa. With an estimated population between 25 000 and 50 000 individuals, the species is classified as vulnerable on the French red list of the IUCN.

## Biodiversity

The site has :

- 94 plant species of which 43 are native and 4 are thought to be endemic;
- 103 species of insects of which 19 are endemic;
- 4 species of terrestrial reptiles including 2 endemic ones;
- 8 species of breeding seabirds ;
- 2 species of breeding ardeids, including the highly endangered Madagascar Pond Heron (classified as endangered on the IUCN world red list) and 12 species of migrating and wintering waders;
- 2 species of marine turtles ;
- 390 species of fish, including 13 species of sharks and 3 of rays;
- 141 species of cnidarians (corals, anemones and jellyfish).



## Management and conservation

The island benefits from an environmental action plan that will soon be associated with a five-year management plan (2017-2021). The agents of the TAAF community and their scientific partners implement environmental monitoring operations (monitoring of heritage species, monitoring of natural habitats). The users (military on detachment, authorities, tourists) are accompanied and sensitized and a zoning plan of the activities is under study.

Since 2013, a plan to fight against the choca (invasive alien plant species) has been implemented by the TAAF (French Southern and Antarctic Lands) in partnership with the Conservatoire botanique de Mascarin and the Armed Forces of the South Indian Ocean zone with the objective of eradicating the species by 2025. A reflection on the plan feasibility to eradicate rat and goat is engaged by the community to curb the decline of biodiversity observed on the island.



### 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.