



RAMSAR SITE  
NUMBER  
**2405**

## Vallées de la Scarpe et de l'Escaut //



FRANCE

Area :  
**27 622 ha**

Date of designation :  
**February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020**

Coordinates :  
**50° 25'N 03° 25'E**

### Summary

The Ramsar site represents the largest inland wetland in the Hauts-de-France region. It contains a varied mosaic of wetlands: water bodies, marshes, peat bogs, meadows, forests; structured by an abundant hydrographic network. The parallel evolution of Man and nature finds its full expression here: some large bodies of water resulting from mining collapses now play an important role in hosting nesting or migratory avifauna while the rich abbey past has shaped an abundant network of ditches. The historical and cultural heritage linked to the wetland character reinforces this close relationship.

### International importance

The low alluvial plain of the Scarpe and Escaut rivers presents a mosaic of wetlands dependent on the influences of the underlying chalk water table. One finds in particular alkaline peat bogs with a complex and rare functioning, within a hydrological system of large rivers of plain. The presence of several exceptional species such as the Field Frog, the Dolomède plantarius, the Marsh Fritillary, the Mercury's Agrion, or the Creeping Ache confirms the international importance of the site.

### General location

Located in Hauts-de-France, in the Nord department, and in the heart of the Scarpe Escaut Regional Nature Park, the site corresponds for the most part to the lower plain of the Scarpe and Escaut rivers. It is contiguous with the Belgian Ramsar site of the Harchies Marshes, and reinforces the cross-border ecological continuities that are already present.



Vallées de la Scarpe  
et de l'Escaut



### Services provided by wetlands

The wetlands of Scarpe-Escaut provide many ecosystem services. Whether for ancient uses such as agriculture, fishing or hunting, or for more recent ones, linked to tourism, nature sports and naturalist activities, Man has been able to draw goods and benefits from these natural environments. In the current context of climate change, certain services are becoming even more important : the contribution to the drinking water cycle, the support of low water levels in rivers, the supply of quality hay in times of drought, and the indispensable role of peatlands in carbon storage.

### Adverse factors

Originally perceived as a source of wealth, the wetlands, which are ubiquitous in the territory, were gradually considered unattractive, even unhealthy and a source of disease.

The marshes were drained for agriculture and the waterways were canalized to develop transportation. More recently, urban sprawl and water pollution have also caused wetlands to shrink.

The effects of climate change (droughts, changes in flood patterns, etc.) are also beginning to impact wetlands.



## Four species representative of the site



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

The fen ragwort, rare in the region, is maintained in the Scarpe and Escaut valleys where it finds its natural habitat, notably at the Vivier de Rodignies. Historically quite frequent, it is today "almost threatened" on the regional red list of the vascular flora.



**MOOR FROG**  
(*Rana arvalis*)

The moor frog of the Scarpe valley are home to the Field Frog, a species listed as "endangered" on the National Red List. Two of the four French populations are found there, located at the limit of their range, disconnected from the nearest Belgian populations. Outside the site, this species is present only in the peaty marshes of the Picardy coast.



**BLUETHROAT**  
(*Luscinia svecica*)

The bluethroat is a small passerine bird that likes wet, bushy reedbeds. This migratory bird is one of the first paludicoles to return to the region after wintering. It is the ambassador of a series of species on the site.



**LARGE WHITE-FACED DARTER**  
(*Leucorrhinia pectoralis*)

Since 2012, the large white-faced darter has been observed regularly in the bogs of Vred and Marchiennes and at the Pré des Nonnettes. The favorable environments for this species (low marsh habitat) are well present today and settlement is likely. Nearly threatened internationally, it is listed as a species of community interest.



## Management and conservation



There are many local provisions and strategies established to ensure the preservation of wetlands. Whether it is the charter of the Regional Natural Park Scarpe-Escaut, the Natura 2000 objective documents, the SAGE Scarpe aval, all these framework documents for the management of natural resources are already mobilizing many actors.

The site is also rich in natural heritage protection systems: 1 National Nature Reserve, 2 Regional Nature Reserves, 5 State Biological Reserves, 1 Special Protection Zone and 2 Special Conservation Zones. In addition, there are natural spaces managed by the Department, the Conservatory of Natural Spaces and the Regional Natural Park.



## Biodiversity

The alluvial plains of the Scarpe and the Escaut rivers are home to a recognized exceptional natural heritage (alkaline peat bogs, alluvial woodlands, plant and animal species that are sometimes rare and specific, etc.). The presence of 4 rare plant species, the majority of the amphibians of the region (10 species), a great diversity of chiropterans (15 species), 29 species of birds, 4 species of dragonflies, 19 fish species including the eel and the bouvière, as well as 31 plant communities typical of the low plains of the European Atlantic coast, explain the international importance of the site.



### 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.