



RAMSAR SITE
NUMBER
517

Golfe du Morbihan //



FRANCE

Area :
23 000 ha

Date of designation :
April 5th 1991

Coordinates :
47° 34' N 02° 47' W

Summary

The "Mor Bihan" (small sea) results from the convergence of three main rias cut off from the ocean by a rocky spur and which communicates with the sea by a narrow gully (900 m). The Gulf of Morbihan integrates several distinct entities: the gulf, composed of a deep western basin (up to 20 m), subject to strong tidal currents (up to 9 knots); and a shallow eastern basin covered with vast seagrass beds; but also wetlands such as the river of Pénérf, the marshes of Suscinio and the river of Saint-Philibert, areas composed of former salt marshes, lagoons, salt meadows and wet meadows.

Internationale importance

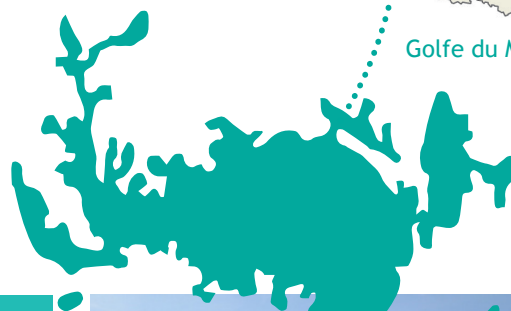
The Gulf of Morbihan is one of the two most important eelgrass beds in France. This habitat, of primary importance on a European scale, plays an essential role in the protection of coasts against erosion. The site regularly hosts winter populations of several tens of thousands of migratory or wintering birds. It is also home to numerous plants of ecological interest, as well as various species of insects, amphibians and mammals. The site plays an important role, particularly as a nursery, in the cycle of many fish species.

General location

The Gulf of Morbihan is located on the southern coast of Brittany, south of the cities of Vannes and Auray and opposite the Quiberon peninsula. A discontinuous part of the site encompasses the Pénérf River to the west of the Vilaine estuary.



Golfe du Morbihan



Services provided by wetlands

The Gulf of Morbihan is famous for its historical and cultural sites, in particular megalithic monuments of great importance (Cairn of Gavrinis, Cromlech of Er lannic, Crom-lech of Ile aux Moines, dolmen of Mané-Lud, Table des marchands). Several more recent historical monuments (heart of the city of Vannes, castle of Suscinio - 13th century) are located in the periphery. It represents a major socio-economic value on the scale of the department, essentially thanks to the exploitation of its natural resources and its ecological qualities.

Developed since 1860, the oyster farming sector generates an annual turnover of 10 million euros. The fishing, on board or on foot, is essentially artisanal and practiced 8 months a year.

The gulf is also an important place for leisure activities related to the water (recreational fishing, sailing, sea kayaking, cruising, diving) which attract many visitors each year.



Adverse factors

The factors that can alter the ecological qualities of the site are numerous and partially identified : degradation of the eelgrass beds (fishing, dredging), increase of the frequentation (disturbance), water pollution by the watershed (agricultural effluents, insufficient wastewater treatment systems).

The development of invasive species is a growing problem for the marine environment (red algae, Japanese clams, Japanese oysters, etc.), continental aquatic environments (seaweed), and terrestrial environments (Baccharis, sacred ibis, etc.).



Four species representative of the site



PIED AVOCET
(*Recurvirostra avosetta*)

The pied avocet is a medium-sized limicolous bird, with black and white plumage present in the Gulf of Morbihan all year round. It frequents the mudflats during the winter period, with a population of over a thousand individuals. The breeding of the avocet was observed for the first time in the gulf in 1980. At first in strong increase, the numbers stabilized then with several hundred couples.



DWARF EELGRASS
(*Zostera noltii*)

The dwarf eelgrass develops in the tidal zone (foreshore). It forms meadows, sometimes dense, comparable to terrestrial meadows. These meadows are decreasing in the Gulf but their ecological roles are multiple :

- Water oxygenation, carbon trap;
- Areas of high primary production;
- Essential food resource for many wintering birds, etc.



BRANT GOOSE
(*Branta bernicla*)

The brant is a small goose with dark plumage that nests in Siberia and winters mainly along the French Atlantic coast. On the site, it consumes mainly eelgrass. It is an emblematic bird of the Gulf of Morbihan, which was in the past the main wintering site of the species in the world. Its population has been in sharp decline for the last twenty years.



COMMON SEA LAVENDER
(*Limonium vulgare*)

This plant typical of salt meadows is relatively abundant in the Gulf of Morbihan. It is part of a vegetal procession which develops on the schorre with the salicornes and the obione. Salt meadows are in a satisfactory state of conservation at the Ramsar site scale, but they can nevertheless be degraded by overgrazing or coastal urbanization.



Management et conservation

As the Ramsar site is superimposed on a set of local systems (Natura 2000, Schéma de Mise en Valeur de la Mer, Arrêtés de protection du biotope, Espaces naturels sensibles du Département, etc.), its management is determined by the Natura 2000 management plans or objective documents. They are completed by the management documents of the sites that are subject to strong protection such as the National Nature Reserve of the Marais de Séné or the National Reserve for Hunting and Wildlife.

The site is shared between the Public Maritime Domain (DPM), for the maritime parts or coastal waters and private properties for most of the islets and banks, encouraging the Conservatoire du littoral to continue its policy of acquiring the islets of the gulf.

The animation of the Natura 2000 sites by 2 project managers allows the emergence of contracts or Natura 2000 charters for the management of certain environments (marshes, islets, moors) and allows to inform the elected officials, the professional or leisure actors and the State services, of the biodiversity issues of the site.



Biodiversity

The Gulf of Morbihan has about 35 habitats and subtypes of habitats of European interest, of which a large part (87%) are marine habitats. The eelgrass beds form vast homogeneous groups (800 ha), including the second largest eelgrass bed in France (530 ha) after that of the Arcachon basin.

The flora of the site is composed of 68 plant species of heritage interest linked to wetlands and coastal environments such as: the Small Bulrush (*Eleocharis parvula*), the Swimming Flute (*Luronium natans*) or the Small Statice (*Limonium humile*).

The Gulf of Morbihan is above all an exceptional site for birds, hosting more than 50 sedentary or migratory species of ardeids (herons), anatidae (ducks), or waders.

Along the peripheral waterways and all around the gulf, we can also note the presence of the European Otter (*Lutra lutra*), the Green Treefrog (*Hyla arborea*), the Mercury's Agrion (*Coenagrion mercuriale*) and the Succulent's Damier (*Euphydryas aurinia*).

Several species of arachnids fond of coastal wetlands, notably the argyronet (*Argyroneta aquatica*) or Sitticus inexpectus (first French record) were also observed.



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.