



RAMSAR SITE  
NUMBER  
**709**

## Baie du Mont-Saint-Michel //



FRANCE

Area :  
**47 800 ha**

Date of designation :  
**October 14<sup>th</sup> 1994**

Coordinates :  
**48 ° 39' N, 01 ° 36' W**

### Summary

Mont-Saint-Michel bay occupies a depression of about 500 km<sup>2</sup> which has the second largest tidal range in Europe, from 10 to 11 m on average, and up to 16 m during the equinox tides. Three main rivers flow into the bay: the Couesnon, the Sée and the Sélune. The intertidal zone, with an area of more than 240 km<sup>2</sup>, is composed of a mosaic of habitats (mudflats, hermele reefs, salt marshes); completed by peripheral marshes, dune systems, cliffs and two rocky islets, including the one on which the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel was built between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### International importance

Mont-Saint-Michel bay is an immense coastal wetland and littoral zone which shelters an exceptional biodiversity. A colony of calf seals is established there while the foreshore, with its salt marshes, among the largest in Europe, regularly welcomes more than 100 000 birds (waders, ducks, geese). 68 species of birds of community interest frequent the bay. The large hydraulic complex formed by the bay and its rivers also plays a special role for amphihaline fish such as the Atlantic salmon.

### General location

The site is located both in Brittany and Normandy. Open to the sea, from the Pointe du Grouin in the north of Cancale to the Pointe du Roc in Granville, it flares out inland to the southeast through the three estuaries. Several terrestrial marshes are also integrated into it, to the southwest and to the east.



Baie du Mont-Saint-Michel

### Services provided by wetlands

The bay is a natural setting for the Mont Saint-Michel, "Wonder of the West" listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and contributes to the universal value of this property.

Its schorre and fine silted sands constitute the nursery of about 70% of the marine fish of the Norman-Breton Gulf. Its wetlands have a carbon capture potential estimated around 20,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per year.

The biological richness and productivity of the site allow for a wide variety of activities related to the quality of the natural environment: sea, boat and foot fishing; freshwater fishing; shellfish farming; waterfowl hunting; sheep farming; hiking and walking; scientific and recreational naturalist activities.

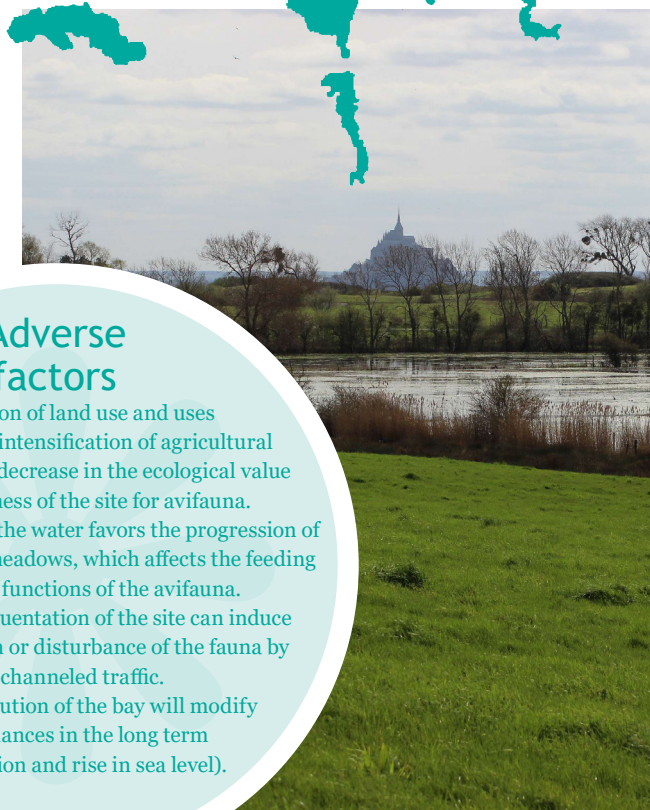
### Adverse factors

The evolution of land use and uses (artificialization, intensification of agricultural practices) causes a decrease in the ecological value and attractiveness of the site for avifauna.

Excessive nitrogen in the water favors the progression of sea grass on the salt meadows, which affects the feeding and reception functions of the avifauna.

The important frequentation of the site can induce habitat degradation or disturbance of the fauna by badly channeled traffic.

Finally, the evolution of the bay will modify certain balances in the long term (sedimentation and rise in sea level).





## Four species representative of the site



**COMMON SEAL**  
(*Phoca vitulina*)

Of average size (from 1.30 to 1.60 m and from 90 to 110 kg), the common seal has a dorsal coloration varying from light grey to dark brown depending on the individual.

A sedentary colony is installed in the bay and takes advantage at low tide of the resting places of sandy banks located off the Mont Saint-Michel.

Population numbers have tripled in the past 15 years to almost 120 individuals in 2021.



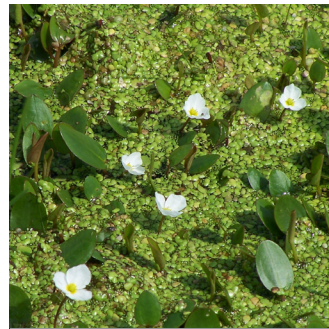
**HONEYCOMB WORM**  
(*Sabellaria alveolata*)

The honeycomb worm are small tubicolous worms (3 to 4 cm) able to elaborate bioconstructions from sand and shell debris in suspension.

They form real reefs which can reach more than 1 m high and transform the loose sediments into hard substrate, thus changing the hydrodynamics of the area.

They constitute refuge zones for numerous species of mollusks and crustaceans.

It is the largest reef of its kind in Europe.



**FLOATING WATER-PLANTAIN**  
(*Luronium natans*)

This protected aquatic plant is in strong regression. It is present in several peripheral marshes of the bay.

Thanks to its rhizomes, it colonizes the banks and the bottom of brooks in period of low water. Its floating leaves are oval or lanceolate and its flowers consist of 3 rounded white petals with a yellow base.

The actions carried out in the Regional Nature Reserve of the Sougéal marshes make it one of the largest stations in Western Europe.



**KENTISH PLOVER**  
(*Charadrius alexandrinus*)

This small migratory shorebird arrives in the bay in the spring and leaves in late summer.

Its brown back allows it to be camouflaged easily, the nest being carried out on the ground. It feeds on small invertebrates (insects, worms, mollusks) which it finds mainly in the sea lees. The Breton shellfish beds in the bay host one of the main breeding colonies in northwestern France every year.



## Management and conservation

Two Natura 2000 sites have been designated in the bay, one for the preservation of birds and the other for the preservation of habitats, and cover almost the entire Ramsar site. They are equipped with a document of objectives since 2011.

The salt meadows are subject to pastoral management plans, to authorize and frame the grazing of salt meadow sheep through administrative authorizations and management tools. They are partly financially supported by agri-environmental measures. In addition, several peripheral marshes are equipped with ecological management systems.

The eastern part of the bay is a classified site under the law of 2 May 1930, which contributes greatly to the maintenance of the landscape quality.

The management plan for the UNESCO property, which is currently being drawn up, will eventually be the integrating management document that will take up the provisions of initiatives such as Natura 2000 and the landscape plan.



## Biodiversity

The bay is a coherent whole from the sea to the natural entities back-littoral. It is composed of a mosaic of habitats (sea, foreshore, cliffs, dunes, marshes, woods, etc.) forming a large functional ecological complex.

The conditions are ideal for the reception of the avifauna (major axis of migration and zone of refuge in period of great cold). We can observe a significant number of sandpipers and red knots, oystercatchers, curlews, silver plovers, pintails, brant and godwits.

The site also presents very good potential for the passage of migratory fish and the frequentation by marine mammals.

On the maritime domain, we can note the quality of the habitats, with the largest mass of hermelles in Europe and the vast salt meadows, nesting sites for several species of passerines and wintering ground for thousands of Brant geese.



### 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.