

# La Petite Camargue //



RAMSAR SITE NUMBER  
**786**



Area :  
**37 000 ha**

Date of designation :  
**January 8<sup>th</sup> 1996**

Coordinates :  
**43° 30' N 04° 15' E**

## Summary

This vast wetland area of 37,000 hectares was listed by the Ramsar Convention in 1996. In this sector, which extends from the edge of the Petit-Rhône to the Étang de l'Or, the joint action of the river and the sea has contributed to the formation of a mosaic of wetlands where fauna, flora and human activities are established and cohabit in harmony.

## International importance

The Petite Camargue is identified, on a global scale, for the rarity and fragility of the natural environments and the animal and plant species that live there. There are habitats of major interest such as lagoons, coastal dunes, Mediterranean salt steppes, wet meadows, reed beds and brackish ponds.

## General location

This Ramsar site straddles the departments of Gard and Hérault, west of the Rhone delta.



La Petite Camargue

## Services provided by wetlands

These wetlands provide various services such as fishing, reed harvesting (sagne), extensive bull breeding (manades). Hunting of waterfowl is also practiced there. Tourism is also very present with, in parallel to the seaside activities, an increasing interest in naturalist and heritage activities. These spaces also play a major role in the regulation of floods and can be used for the expansion of marine intrusions.

## Adverse factors

The demographic expansion around large urban areas is increasing the impacts on these wetlands (wastewater discharges, tourist pressure, etc.).

The spread of invasive species is threatening the specificity of natural environments.



## Four species representative of the site



**CAMARGUE BULL**

Inseparable from the natural heritage of the Ramsar site, this animal lives in extensive grazing conditions that maintain open ecosystems of high quality, favorable to the presence of rare or protected plants such as the lax-flowered orchid (*Orchis laxiflora*) or the summer snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*). Bred mainly for bullfighting games, these bulls can also be integrated into the meat production circuit under the PDO label "*Raço di bòiu*" (*Camargue bull*).



**EUROPEAN POND TERRAPIN**  
(*Emys orbicularis*)

The European pond terrapin has deserted most wetlands, except for a few rare coastal areas. Cold-blooded animal, this small aquatic turtle must observe long periods of sunbathing in order to accumulate the energy necessary for its activities. This site is a major focus for the safeguarding of this species globally threatened by the fragmentation of wetlands, inadequate maintenance of ditches and canals, and the release of exotic turtles.



**LITTLE TERN**  
(*Sternula albifrons*)

Its very small size, its white forehead and its yellow beak with black tip are characteristic. This migratory species is not very widespread. It frequents in particular the wetlands behind the beaches and can be observed at the edge of lagoons where it nests on natural or artificial islands. We can also meet within the breeding colonies, another rare species, the Hansel tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) which finds around the Etang de l'Or one of its main breeding sites in France.



**GLOSSY IBIS**  
(*Plegadis falcinellus*)

Long absent from the territory, this species has been nesting regularly since 2006 with significant numbers, particularly in the Scamandre regional nature reserve, east of the Ramsar site. Ibises generally build their nests in flooded wooded areas where they mix with little egrets (*Egretta garzetta*), hairy crakes (*Ardeola ralloides*), black-crowned night herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), and black-crowned night herons (*Bulbuscus ibis*).



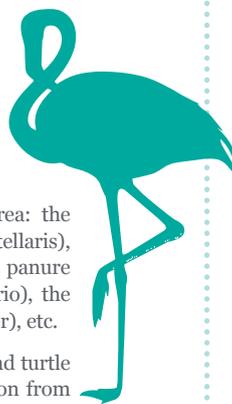
## Biodiversity

The lagoon areas are breeding grounds for migrating marine fish such as eels, sea bass and sea bream.

From the reed beds to the pine forests, passing through the sansouires and the wet meadows, the flora here has the particularity of being of a very great diversity and a remarkable wealth.

There are more than 150 species of rare birds in this area: the purple heron (*Ardea purpurea*), the bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), the falcinellus ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), the moustached panure (*Panurus biarmicus*), the sultana turtle (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), the little tern (*Sternula albifrons*), the black tern (*Chlidonias niger*), etc.

Among the reptiles, it is worth mentioning the European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*) which is the subject of particular attention from the managers.



## Management and conservation

Two managers, the Syndicat mixte pour la protection et la gestion de la Camargue gardoise (SMCG) and the Syndicat mixte du bassin de l'Or (SYMBO) are committed to the protection and harmonious development of these extremely rich and fragile environments. With the support of the Gard and Hérault departments, as well as the State and the European Union, they have respectively chosen to implement an environmental charter associated with a water development and management plan (SAGE) and a bay contract. These tools complement the actions already undertaken in consultation with users and institutional partners, with a view to improving the quality and management of the environment and the development of human activities, and to improving knowledge of and access to this exceptional heritage.



### 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.