

Lac du Bourget - Marais de Chautagne //



RAMSAR SITE NUMBER
1268



FRANCE

Area :
5 500 ha

Date of designation :
February 2nd 2003

Coordinates :
45° 44' N 5° 51' E

Summary

The largest lake entirely in France (4,500 ha), the Lac du Bourget is linked to the Upper Rhône to the north by the Chautagne marshes, a vast peaty alluvial zone.

This hydrosystem connected to the Rhone still harbors a significant part of its original biodiversity (animal and plant).

In spite of a recovery in water quality, the quantitative aspects remain unfavorable and require close work with the socio-economic actors (elected officials, farmers, etc.).

International importance

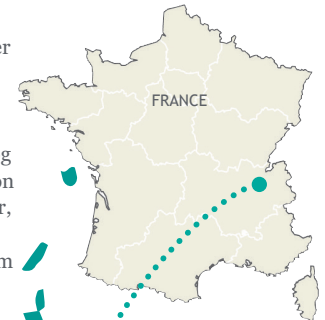
A deep lake connected to the Rhone migratory corridor, Lac du Bourget was listed in the Ramsar Convention for its capacity to host water birds, of which more than 20,000 individuals winter in certain years.

Through Natura 2000, the Birds Directive has reinforced this classification by taking into account the nesting of several species of herons, kingfishers and black kites.

As for the Habitats Directive, it highlights several habitats, both lacustrine and palustrine, and species of butterflies, mammals and reptiles.

General location

A true "hydraulic annex" of the upper Rhône located in Savoie, the Lac du Bourget and the Chautagne peat bog occupy a depression tangent to the river, between the Jura and the Alps, 50 km downstream from Geneva and 10 km from Chambéry.



Lac du Bourget
Marais de Chautagne

Services provided by wetlands

The first service rendered by this immense basin is the flood control of the Rhone, a "service" that was forced in the 1980s following the hydroelectric development of the river, allowing a regulation of the level of the lake.

Drinking water is also a precious resource, exploited for the lake, potential and of regional importance for the Chautagne water table.

The landscape, qualified in particular by its reed beds, is a third resource : a "seaside" tourism in which soft mobility and ecotourism are gradually making a place, including in the marshes thanks to actions of rehydration, renaturation and valorization of the areas of corn and poplar cultivation.

Adverse factors

The lowering and regulation of the Lac du Bourget, as well as the rarefaction of the submergence of the Chautagne marsh following the dikes and the hydroelectric development, strongly aggravate the phenomena of erosion of the lake reed beds, mineralization of the peat and overgrowth of the marshes.

The right-of-way for crops (corn, poplar) remains important and prohibits the blocking of drains. The strong economic and tourist development of the Lac du Bourget watershed requires vigilance with regard to zoning and the regulation of uses.



Four species representative of the site



EUROPEAN POND TERRAPIN
(*Emys orbicularis*)

Amphibious reptile, the European pond terrapin lives in calm and well vegetated waters and lays its eggs in the dry grasslands around the lake.

These characteristics make it vulnerable to road collisions and landscape fragmentation.

Since 2000, a reintroduction program has included the creation and restoration of aquatic and dry environments, as well as small wildlife crossings.



ARCTIC CHAR
(*Salvelinus alpinus*)

Less well known than its cousin the lavaret, the Arctic char is also rarer for two reasons:

- more demanding in water quality (colder and oxygenated waters) it suffers from the warming of the lake waters;
- located higher in the food pyramid, it accumulates more pollutants.

The ban on its consumption, which has been in place for several years, does not compensate for the species' natural spawning deficit.



FALSE RINGLET
(*Coenonympha oedippus*)

The Chautagne is home to a large population of this discreet and protected butterfly.

This population is however threatened, not by the absence of the host plants of its caterpillar (mullein and other grasses, sedges, etc.), but by the drying up of the marsh which leads to a decrease of the humidity and the availability of nectariferous flowers; two factors which are essential for the adults.



SUMMER LADY'S-TRESSES
(*Spiranthes aestivalis*)

There are only two remaining stations of this orchid in the Chautagne region. It requires a lot of water and sun, but above all few nutrients in the soil.

Agro-environmental maintenance with late mowing and zero inputs is particularly suitable for this plant, whose numbers and distribution depend on rainfall and flood frequency.

Management and conservation



Biodiversity

Beyond the "pelagic" lacustrine environment, the area of the meadows and then the belt of heliophytes ("reedbeds") condition a large part of the food chains and habitats, and therefore of the biodiversity of the site. Birds and dragonflies gather most of the remarkable species of the littoral; the richness in invertebrates remains however to be specified.

On the terrestrial side, if the reedbeds remain essential for the small fauna, it is the meadows that host the main issues - flora and butterflies in particular.

Finally, the perimeter includes two limestone massifs whose almost Mediterranean microclimate reinforces the biodiversity of this site.

Since the restoration of water quality and transparency, the coastal reed beds are the main concern. They benefit from regular low water levels (-40 cm) introduced in 2017, waste removal, surface monitoring and maintenance of anti-penetration stakes.

On the marshes, agri-environmental maintenance is necessary and sufficient: late mowing dates, refuge areas, consultation with the farmers; the continuation of a program of drain plugging, in the marsh area as well as in the forest area, will lead to new perspectives for the conservation, according to the consultations, follow-ups and valorization.

The Conservatoire du Littoral (owner or assignee) and the Conservatoire d'espaces naturels de Savoie (manager) work in synergy for the best conservation of this Ramsar 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.