

# Bassin d'Arcachon - Secteur du delta de la Leyre //



RAMSAR SITE  
NUMBER  
**1996**



Area :  
**5 175 ha**

Date of designation :  
**October 27<sup>th</sup> 2011**

Coordinates :  
**44° 40' N 01° 02' W**

## Summary

The Leyre delta is at the interface between the fresh waters of the Leyre watershed and the salty waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Located on one of the most important migration routes in Europe, the delta is made up, from upstream to downstream, of a mosaic of meadows and floodable woodlands, dyked areas, reedbeds, salt meadows fragmented with ton lakes, but also sandy banks and mudflats crisscrossed with numerous channels.

## International importance

This site has been included in the list of wetlands of international importance because of its large number of habitats, plant and animal species. These marshes are the habitat of certain terrestrial heritage species, such as the European mink, or aquatic species, such as the eel, as well as numerous fish juveniles. They are also home to passerines, such as the white-mirrored blue-throat. They can also serve as a resting place for water birds. This diversity of habitats also ensures favorable conditions for the stopover or wintering of migratory birds, whose populations are quite exceptional. Half of the French brant population winters on the maritime parts of the delta.

## General location

This Ramsar site is located in the eastern part of the Arcachon basin, in the southwest of France, on the Atlantic coast.



Le delta de la Leyre  
à l'est du bassin d'Arcachon

## Services provided by wetlands

In addition to constituting a high place of biodiversity, this set of marine and terrestrial ecosystems constitutes a buffer zone against marine submersion. The maritime marshes play an important role in purifying runoff from the Leyre watershed and in recycling the organic matter necessary for the life of the Arcachon basin. The delta also serves as a nursery for fish. Because of its landscapes and the organization of itineraries (land and waterways), the site is an important place for ecotourism and environmental education. Other human activities include aquaculture, livestock, hunting and fishing, and recreational activities. The landscape value of the delta is therefore important.

## Adverse factors

Its ecological and hydrological functions are threatened. Difficulties in maintaining the former fish ponds, the abandonment of traditional grazing activities as well as work on the banks have led to the proliferation of plants such as the false cotton plant (*Baccharis halimifolia*), the closing of the meadows and the filling in of the maritime marshes. This gradual landfall diminishes its ecological role as a spawning ground and limits the upstream migration of amphibious fish. Numerous exotic species with invasive characteristics have also been identified. In addition, the increase of the frequentation on the terrestrial and maritime parts (anthropic and aerial pressure) as well as the excess of certain hunting practices are worrying factors.



## Four species representative of the site



**NANTES WHITE-THROATED SPARROW**  
(*Luscinia svecica namnetum*)

The site hosts important populations of the nantes white-throated sparrow, a taxon endemic to the french atlantic coast. As a species listed in annex 1 of the birds directive, the Nantes white-throated sparrow must be subject to special conservation measures concerning its habitat, in order to ensure its survival and reproduction in its range.



**EURASIAN SPOONBILL**  
(*Platalea leucorodia*)

The site is a crucial pre- and post-nuptial migratory stopover for the Eurasian Spoonbill as well as the first French wintering site.



**EURASIAN OTTER**  
(*Lutra lutra*)

The site is an important place for the reception of the Eurasian otter (not known) of which traces of presence are observed from the alluvial forest to the dyked areas.



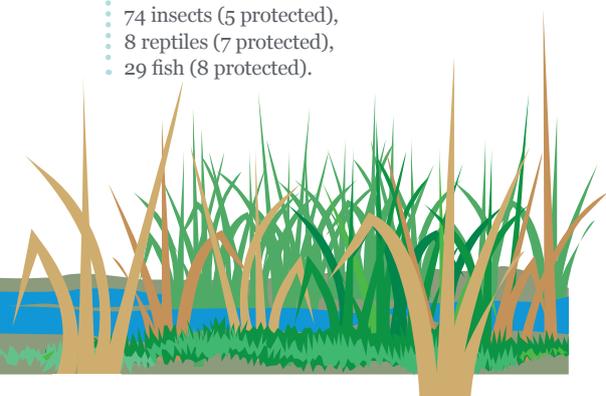
**BRANT GOOSE**  
(*Branta bernicla bernicla*)

In winter, on the whole Arcachon basin, the numbers of brant have been fluctuating for the last ten years between 50,000 and 60,000 individuals. They come to winter on the lagoon, attracted by the immense eelgrass beds (*Zostera noltii*). These are 50% of the total number of overwintering birds in France and between 25% and 30% of the typical subspecies *Branta b. bernicla*.

## Biodiversity

The site has 93 natural and modified habitats, 570 plant species (of which 33 are protected) and a high number of animal species:

- 35 mammals (21 protected),
- 7 amphibians (6 protected),
- 324 birds (44 protected),
- 74 insects (5 protected),
- 8 reptiles (7 protected),
- 29 fish (8 protected).



## Management and conservation

The Ramsar site overlaps a multitude of existing delimitations (Natura 2000, natural marine park, sensitive natural area, hunting reserve, etc.). In partnership with the various public and private stakeholders of the site and thanks to the funding of the Gironde Departmental Council, the Landes de Gascogne Regional Nature Park has been implementing a concerted management program on the scale of the Leyre Delta Ramsar site since 2015.

The collective management program for the Leyre delta stems from the park's charter, which aims to "promote comprehensive and coordinated management of the Leyre delta". This measure is linked to other measures that aim to "take into account climate change in the overall hydraulic management of the delta" and to "base the attractiveness of the territory on a revealed and preserved heritage". The project associates local actors and users on the themes of knowledge of the sites and social and economic practices.



### 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.