Les zones humides et marines de Saint-Martin //

RAMSAR SITE NUMBER
2029

Area :
2 997 ha

Date of designation :
October 27th 2011

Coordinates :
18°05'N 63°05'W

Summary

The island of Saint Martin is home to nearly 3,000 hectares of wetlands and marine areas that are home to nearly 2,140 animal and plant species, 21 of which are threatened, and 7 of which are endemic to the island.
Ideally located geographically, this biodiversity hotspot is a major migratory stopover and a breeding area of regional importance. The diversity of habitats and ecosystems present on the island makes it possible to host this rich natural heritage, mainly within the coastal wetlands : lagoons, mangrove forests, sea grass beds, coral reefs.

Internationale importance

Despite its small size, Saint-Martin has a high rate of endemism. Its strategic position makes it a privileged migratory stopover for migratory species, a swarming area for the dispersion of larvae, seeds and migratory individuals. The wetlands provide feeding, resting and breeding areas for these species. Every year, little terns (Sterna antillarum) nest in the summer on the shallow sandbanks of the ponds, humpback whales (Megaptera novaeangliae) breed and give birth early in the year in the shallow coastal waters, and 3 species of sea turtles come to lay their eggs on the beaches from March to November.

General location

The island of Saint-Martin is located in the northern part of the Lesser Antilles, between Anguilla to the north and Saint-Barts to the southeast. The wetlands and marine areas of Saint-Martin include 14 ponds spread over the entire French part.

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Services provided by wetlands

Given the specific constraints of the territory (population density, tourism-based economy, structural backwardness in terms of equipment and infrastructure), the ecosystem services provided free of charge by the wetlands to the population of Saint-Martin are essential for maintaining a quality living environment. These include: carbon sequestration by trees and grass beds, coastal protection by reefs and mangroves, resource production (wood, fodder, fishing), cultural services related to culinary traditions, nature-based recreation, water services (quality and supply) and pollination services.

Adverse factors

The main causes of degradation of natural areas (untreated wastewater, land clearing, embankments, illegal discharges) result from a lack of interest of the population for these environments - related to the narrowness of the island, and the bad image of mangroves - with regard to land pressure and tourism.

In addition, the growing impact of global phenomena such as climate change, the resurgence of diseases and the introduction of invasive exogenous species that increase the sensitivity of the environments to new stresses such as the increased frequency and intensity of hurricanes, like Irma in September 2017.

Four species representative of the site

NASSAU GROUPER
(Epinephelus striatus)

This fish with mottled sides of light gray and brown frequents successively mangrove, seagrass and reef areas during its life.
Very sought after for the delicacy of its flesh, it is also appreciated for its behavior by divers.
Having become rare under the impact of fishing, the species is particularly sensitive during the large annual gatherings of individuals on sites known as breeding aggregations.
Currently recognized as "endangered" at the international level, it is the subject of a local conservation program funded with the LIFE BIODIV'OM european program.

LITTLE BLUE HERON
(Egretta caerulea)

This heron of 51 to 76cm for 350 grams, frequents the banks of the ponds and wetlands of Saint-Martin.
In spite of the dark and bluish dress raised by the adults, the juveniles are white with a bluish beak. It frequents the mangroves to feed, rest and reproduce.
Its conservation status at the global level has been recognized as special concern by the IUCN.

STAGHORN CORAL
(Acropora cervicornis)

Coral forming arborescent colonies made up of long and spindly tangled branches, of light yellow color, it forms massifs of a height from 20 cm to 2,5m, within shallow zones (0 to 20m) with clear and calm waters. Among the fastest growing species in the Caribbean (10 cm/year), its population is currently declining due to its high sensitivity to temperature increases, pollution and the increasing presence of coral disease in anthropized coastal waters.

TURTLEGRASS
(Thalassia testudinum)

This flowering plant populates shallow waters and seasonally produces seeds that are dispersed by marine currents, helping to stabilize the sediment by means of an important root system called the matte. These plant formations are essential for the feeding of green turtles, as well as for many fish and crustaceans, and also host some sharks during their reproduction phase. They are currently in competition with an introduced invasive species: Halophila stipulacea.

Management and conservation

The wetlands and marine areas of Saint Martin include 14 ponds protected by an Arrêté de Protection du Biotope, to which is added for two ponds as well as for the marine areas, a classification in National Nature Reserve. All these areas are managed by the Association de Gestion de la Réserve Naturelle de Saint Martin, created specifically to ensure the management of this protected natural area.

Since 1997, an agreement between the State and the association sets the terms of management, supported by a board of directors and an advisory committee of the Natural Nature Reserve.

These management actions are financially supported by an annual grant from the French State, as well as by an innovative financial instrument: the fee on commercial activities carried out within the RNN of St. Martin, which gives it a self-financing capacity.

Biodiversity

The wetlands of Saint Martin are home to 3 main types of environments containing a multitude of ecological units: the marine environment (magnoliaceous sea grass beds, coral formations), the terrestrial environment (mangrove swamps and swamp forests) and the lake or lagoon environments.

Scientific work has so far allowed us to identify no less than 2,140 animal and plant species inhabiting these remarkable natural areas. Among them, there are 21 threatened species, 7 endemic species of the island and 25 species in the Lesser Antilles.

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.

www.ramsar.org

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