

Étang de Saint-Paul //



RAMSAR SITE
NUMBER
2398



Area :
485 ha

Date of designation :
July 15th 2019

Coordinates :
19° 00'S 55° 17'E

Summary

The pond of Saint-Paul is the largest coastal pond of the Reunionese coasts and the largest wetland of the Mascarene archipelago, with an area of over 400 hectares.

Former bay filled under the action of marine and detrital sedimentation, to become over time an alluvial plain, it has the distinction of being mostly isolated from the sea by the presence of a dune cordon that obstructs its mouth.

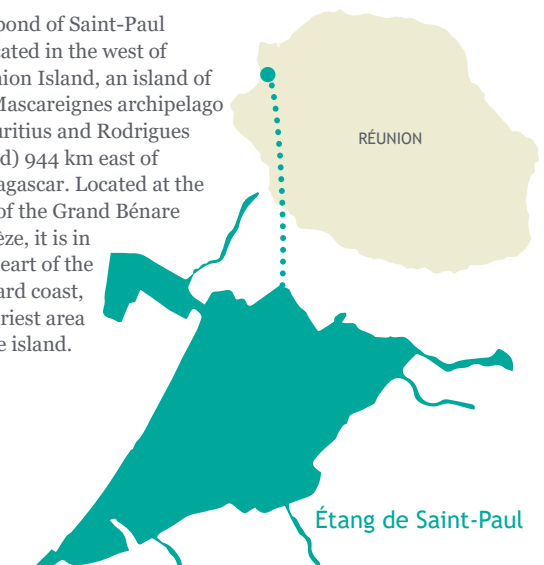
This particular and rich environment, next to the "Bay of the best anchorage" (the bay of Saint-Paul) and the dead cliffs of the Grand Bénare planèze, was the place where the first inhabitants of Reunion Island settled.

International importance

In addition to its remarkable geological aspect, its diversity in species and habitats makes the Étang de Saint-Paul one of the richest sites on the island. It is mainly constituted of plant communities typical of wetlands, such as papyraies, typhaies, hygrophilous meadows and relics of sub-mangrove. The fauna is composed of numerous species native to Reunion and the Mascarene Islands, including a remarkable ichthyofauna and avifauna, completed by long-distance migratory birds. This site has a particular importance at the scale of the Indian Ocean for the number of threatened species which find there a place of feeding, hunting, reproduction or protection.

General location

The pond of Saint-Paul is located in the west of Reunion Island, an island of the Mascareignes archipelago (Mauritius and Rodrigues Island) 944 km east of Madagascar. Located at the foot of the Grand Bénare planèze, it is in the heart of the leeward coast, the driest area of the island.



Services provided by wetlands

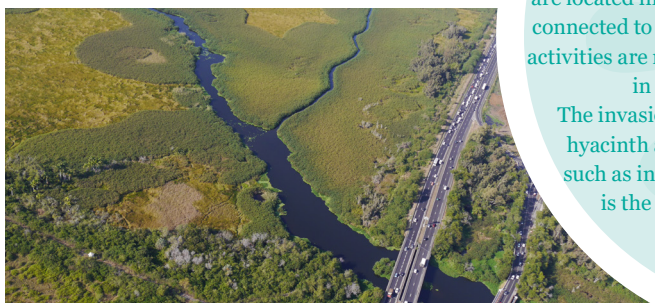
The pond of Saint-Paul is a buffer zone between the hydrous contributions of the largest catchment area of the commune (more than 106 km²) and the release of these waters into the sea, which allows in rainy periods the protection of the city of Saint-Paul against floods. It is a vast water purification area and constitutes the largest drinking water reservoir in the commune with the presence of 7 boreholes for an average annual withdrawal of 8 million m³.

Finally, it allowed the installation of the first human communities of the island, then socio-economic activities such as agriculture (mangoes, peppers, coconut trees, market gardening, etc.), fishing and eco-tourism.

Adverse factors

The site is located in the heart of the city of Saint-Paul, which is included in an urban area of more than 100,000 inhabitants: the anthropic pressure is therefore very important. Urban buildings are located in the immediate vicinity, some homes are not connected to a functional sewage system and agricultural activities are numerous throughout the watershed but also in the immediate vicinity of the site.

The invasion by floating exotic species such as water hyacinth and water lettuce, and terrestrial species such as incense, butterfly liana or Indian tamarind is the main cause of biodiversity loss in the Étang de Saint-Paul.



Four species representative of the site



FLOWERING TREE
(*Hibiscus tiliaceus*)

Present in the Mascarene Islands, the flowering tree is a protected native species of Reunion Island. This malvaceous, also called Mahot seaside, has glabrous leaves in the shape of heart and yellow flowers in bell. It can reach more than ten meters high and is the rare witness of the halophilic wooded formations of the back beach, called sub-mangrove.



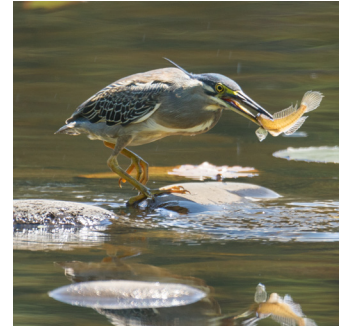
SUNFLOWER
(*Monarrhenus pinifolius*)

Rupicolous shrub of the gullies of the semi-dry zone, the sunflower is a protected endemic species of Reunion. Close relative of another protected species of the island, *Monarrhenus salicifolius*, this bush of approximately one meter is distinguished by its leaves with the narrow limb which remind those of the pine, from where its epithet *pinifolius*. The tubular flowers of pink to mauve color are grouped in capitules.



REUNION MARSH HARRIER
known as **PAPANGUE**
(*Circus maillardi*)

The Papangue is the only nesting bird of prey on Reunion Island. It is an endemic species of the island and has been protected since 1989. With an average wingspan of one meter, the bird presents a plumage with a very marked sexual dimorphism. It feeds on rats, birds and small reptiles that it hunts at very low height above the vegetation. Two breeding pairs have been observed in the heart of the St. Paul's Pond for several years.



MANGROVE HERON
known as **STRIATED HERON**
(*Butorides striata*)

Protected species, the striated heron is a nesting bird present on the coast, waterways and ponds of the island. Discreet and solitary bird, it wears a plumage of gray color and streaked with green. It feeds on fish, amphibians and invertebrates thanks to its long beak. On the pond of Saint-Paul, the bittern population is estimated at about fifty birds.

Translation form french : H.Zarrouki Ministry of ecological transition (MTE)



Biodiversity

The site is an identified reservoir of biodiversity in Reunion: the flora and fauna present are characteristic of wetlands, rare environments on the Reunion coast. The mosaic of natural hygrophilous habitats supports diverse animal populations, especially arthropods, birds and fish. In the gullies of the site, from the first meters upstream of the pond and almost without transition, the vegetation becomes dry and shelters relics of the original semi-xerophilous forest of the leeward coast. To date, 29 plant species and 11 endangered animal species have been recorded on the site.



Management and conservation

The site of the pond of Saint-Paul is classified on 447 hectares in National Nature Reserve since January 2, 2008. As such, its management is framed in the Management Plan 2015-2020, and implemented by the Régie RNNESP (National Nature Reserve - Etang de Saint-Paul).

The main management actions concern the control of invasive exotic plants that obstruct the channels and prevent light from entering the water, or that deeply modify the natural habitats of the site.

The manager also assists farmers, local residents, fishermen and all project owners around the site, to enable them to carry out their activities in a sustainable manner, while respecting this exceptional environment.

The gullies of the site will benefit from a management plan adapted to the stakes and uses of these spaces.



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.