

# La Dombes //



RAMSAR  
SITE NUMBER  
**2500**

Area :  
**47 659 ha**

Date of designation :  
**22 mars 2023**

Coordinates :  
**46°01' N, 05°03'E**

## Summary

The Dombes is one of the largest regions of ponds in France, with 1300 ponds for 12 000 ha of water.

Shaped since the 13th century by the monks and then by large landowners, its hydrographic network includes nearly 700 km of ditches.

The ponds are organized in chains or patches, where water management is governed by centuries-old customs.

The traditional activities practiced on the site (fish farming, hunting, agriculture) have a role in the maintenance of the network of ponds and other wetlands (ponds, meadows).

Although under pressure, the biodiversity remains remarkable.

## International importance

The Dombes is composed of a mosaic of natural and agricultural environments, located on a migratory route between the Rhone and Rhine valleys. More than 280 species of birds, some of which are nesting, such as the Common Tern and the Squacco Heron, and up to 45,000 waterfowl can be observed there during the annual international Wetland monitoring.

The aquatic vegetation and mudflats abound with a diversity of plants, particularly the four-leaved Marsilea and the Swimming Flute.

## General location

The Dombes is located in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, on a vast plateau slightly above the valleys of the Ain, Rhône and Saône rivers, between Lyon and Bourg-en-Bresse, in the Ain department.



La Dombes



## Services provided by wetlands

The history of the ponds is linked to fish production. Today, the fish are still consumed in large part in the region and in the East of France or are used to restock rivers and leisure ponds.

These are remarkable purification zones through a significant production of plant biomass. The positioning upstream of various watersheds makes it a retention and flood prevention zone for the inhabited areas that dot the periphery of the plateau. Water flows between ponds from upstream to downstream. 20 to 25% of the ponds are dry each year, most of them being cultivated.

Part of the territory is wooded. The silviculture is active and aims at the exploitation of the oak in timber and firewood.

Hunting is an important source of income for many landowners.



## Adverse factors

The Dombes depends solely on rainfall to feed the ponds.

This is why the greatest threat is now climate change.

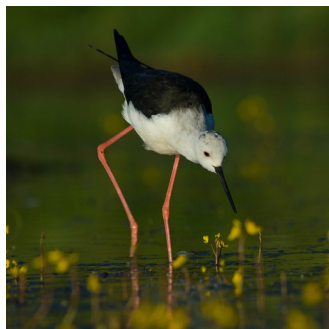
This increases the impacts of intensive agricultural practices on soils that favor the transfer of diffuse pollution.

Drainage has also contributed to the regression of wet meadows and the development of large-scale farming.





## Four species representative of the site



**BLACK-WINGED STILT**  
(*Himantopus himantopus*)

The Black-winged stilt is one of the emblematic birds of the Dombes. With a delicate look, this species with long red legs and black and white plumage progresses in the mudflats or shallow areas to find food.

The Dombes is an important nesting site for this species which settles in small colonies to defend its territory.



**LARGE WHITE-FACED DARTER**  
(*Leucorrhinia pectoralis*)

The Large white-faced darter flourishes in the Dombes in the forest sectors, on ponds with broad belts of vegetation, in particular of jonchaies.

The number of ponds being favorable to it allows to have one of the main populations of the French territory and an important reproduction, in spite of the regular putting in dryness of the ponds.

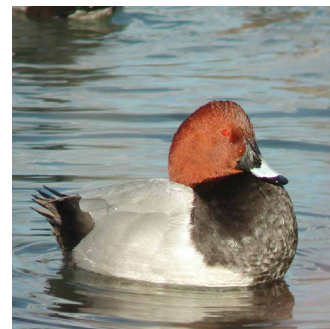


**BOHEMIAN SEDGE**  
(*Carex Bohemica*)

The Bohemian sedge may appear to be widespread in the Dombes, but it is nonetheless a national issue.

The species, unlike other sedges, is easily recognized by its globular inflorescence.

While the large sedge meadows are rare in the Dombes, this species frequents the exposed edges of ponds in a scattered manner.



**COMMON POCHARD**  
(*Aythya Ferina*)

The Dombes bears a strong responsibility as a host land for the "wild game", the local name for the scaup.

This species, which is considered vulnerable on a global and European scale, has a large population in the Dombes, both during the breeding season and in winter.

Scaup numbers are also spectacular during the February run.



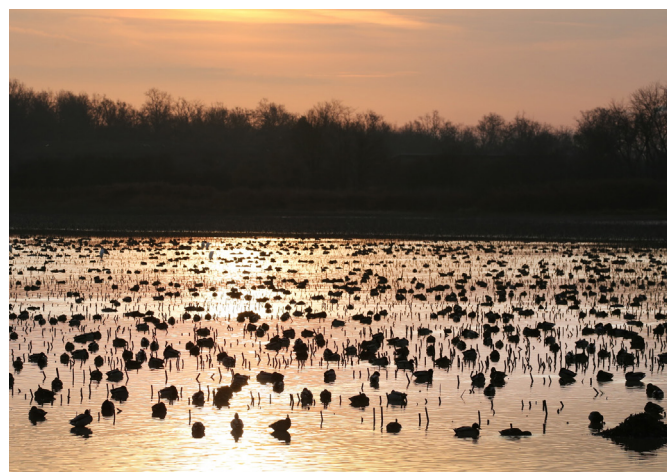
## Management and conservation

The perimeter chosen for the Ramsar site being confused with that of the Natura 2000 site "The Dombes", it is quite naturally the document of objectives of the Natura 2000 site - animated by the Community of communes of the Dombes - which defines the management of the Ramsar site.

One of the major achievements of the local consultation is the experimental program of Payment for ecosystem services (PES) set up thanks to the Water Agency.

These PES affect 3,000 ha of land and 1,000 ha of ponds, and provide financial support to farmers and fish farmers for actions that help restore or maintain ecosystems.

The six Sensitive Natural Areas present in the territory are the gateways to discover the Dombes and its biodiversity. They are managed and monitored by different actors (Fondation Pierre Vérots, Federation of Hunters of Ain, Ain Department, CC Dombes and the French Biodiversity Agency (OFB)).



## Biodiversity

The Dombes is home to an exceptional natural heritage. On the whole of its territory, we count more than 69 species of lepidopterans, 54 species of odonates, 15 species of amphibians, 19 species of chiropterans, and 286 species of birds, of which 120 are "certain nesters".

Water birds find in the Dombes a migratory stopover, a place of wintering, or of reproduction, making it possible to count 38% of the water birds of the Rhône-Alpes Region for only 1% of the regional surface.

Among the amphibians, the tree frog and the great crested newt are the species with high stakes in the periphery of the ponds.

There are also nearly sixty plant species of high heritage value, such as the *Damasium alisma*, several species of *Elatine*, the *Lindernia procumbens* and the *Villarsie*.



### The Ramsar Convention

The Convention on Wetlands, commonly known as the Ramsar Convention, is a global intergovernmental treaty providing the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and their resources. It is the only global treaty dedicated to a particular ecosystem.