Ramsar Sites Information Service

Annotated List of Wetlands of International Importance

El Salvador

8 Ramsar Site(s) covering **228,719 ha**

Area Natural Protegida Laguna del Jocotal

Site number: 970 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Región Oriental de El Salvador
Area: 4,479 ha | Coordinates: 13°21'14"N 88°12'47"W | Designation dates: 22-01-1999
View Site details in RSIS

Área Natural Protegida Laguna del Jocotal is a continental wetland formed by two permanent freshwater lagoons, Laguna del Jocotal and Laguna de San Juan. The Site is a biodiversity hotspot with 151 plant species including the big-leaf mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), Spanish cedar (*Cedrela odorata*) and *Bravaisia integerrima,* a tree of the Acanthus family which is listed as nationally endangered. It also supports hundreds of animal species, including 21 species of fish such as the endemic black robalo (*Centropomus nigrescens*), 252 bird species, 43 mammals, 13 amphibians, and 33 reptiles. Among the fauna found on the Site, there are endangered species included in the IUCN Red List such as the Geoffroy's Spider Monkey (*Ateles geoffroyi*), the yellow-naped amazon (*Amazona auropalliata*) and the American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*). The Site is one of the best examples of a freshwater-flooded ecosystem in the Central American Pacific and provides different ecosystem services including flood control and water purification, as well as food for local communities. Among the main threats are the reduction of the water level in Laguna de Jocotal due to inadequate management, pollution from waste and sediments, and uncontrolled fishing, hunting and livestock farming.

Complejo Bahía de Jiquilisco

Site number: 1,586 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Usulutan
Area: 63,500 ha | Coordinates: 13°13'N 88°31'59"W | Designation dates: 31-10-2005
View Site details in RSIS

Complejo Bahía de Jiquilisco. 31/10/05; Usulutan; 63,500 ha; 13°13'N 088°32'W. The Jiquilisco Bay Complex constitutes the largest extension of brackish water and saltwater forest in El Salvador, including numerous estuaries and canals, sand dunes and beaches, various isles of different sizes, a freshwater lagoon complex and seasonally saturated forests connected to the mangroves, of which at least 6 types are present. The site constitutes the habitat of the large majority of coastal waterbirds in the country and nesting site of species such as Rynchops níger, Sterna antillarum, Charadrius wilsonia and Haematopus palliatus. The surrounding beaches are also nesting sites for the green turtle (Chelonia agassizi), Hawksbill turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata), olive ridley (Lepidochelys olivaceae) and leatherback turtle (Dermochelys coriaceae), all of them threatened due to the overexploitation of their eggs. The site performs a very important function in the prevention of natural catastrophes by stabilizing the soil and preventing erosion. The most important economic activities involve fishing, shellfish extraction, aquiculture, salt extraction, cattle ranching and coconut plantations. There is some tourism in the area. Ramsar site no. 1586. Photos. Most recent RIS information: 2005.

Complejo Barra de Santiago

Site number: 2,207 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Ahuachapán and Sonsonate
Area: 11,519 ha | Coordinates: 13°42'24"N 90°00'59"W | Designation dates: 16-01-2014
View Site details in RSIS

Complejo Barra de Santiago. 16/01/14; Ahuachapán, Sonsonate; 11,519 ha; 13°42'24"N 90°0'59"W. The Site contains an area representative of the mangroves of the dry Northern Pacific ecoregion of Central America and a palm tree (Brahea salvadorensis) swamp representative of an ecosystem specific to the Mesoamerican dry tropical forest ecoregion. It supports numerous threatened or endangered species. Among these are four species of marine turtles (Eretmochelys imbricata, Lepidochelys olivacea, Dermochelys coriacea and Chelonia mydas) and other species severely threatened by their commercial trade value, such as the yellow-naped parrot (Amazona auropalliata). The mangroves also support about 75% of the commercially important coastal fauna in El Salvador. Many of these species, such as the shrimp of the Penaeidae family, depend on the mangroves as feeding, spawning and nursery areas. The Site is important for local communities as they depend on artisanal fishing for their livelihoods. It is threatened by unregulated urbanization, overgrazing, the growth of sugar cane and the increasing demand of wood for construction, as these have caused deforestation, changes in the hydrology of the area and pollution. Ramsar Site No. 2207. Most recent RIS information: 2013.

Complejo Güija

Site number: 1,924 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Santa Ana
Area: 10,180 ha | Coordinates: 14°16'59"N 89°28'59"W | Designation dates: 16-12-2010
View Site details in RSIS

Complejo Güija. 16/12/10; Santa Ana; 10,180 ha; 14°17'N 089°29'W. This Ramsar Site includes the Protected Natural Area San Diego y San Felipe Las Barras, a lagoon complex and its surrounding flooded areas. A part of the Güija complex is also representative of the Central America Dry Tropical Forest ecosystem, which is considered threatened by World Wildlife Fund (WWF). This ecosystem sustains IUCN Red List endangered species like the thorny iguana (Ctenosaura flavidorsalis) and species listed in appendices I and II of CITES as Amazonia albifrons, Puma yagoaroundi and A. auropalliata. The Site also records 59,000 water birds including migratory species such as Anas discors, Anas clypeata and Dendrocygna bicolor, and a high fish diversity that includes 14 native species from El Salvador. These natural resources support fishing at both commercial and subsistence levels as well as other main productive activities such as agriculture and tourism. Invasive species like water hyacinth (Eichornia crassipes) in some lagoons, the expansion of agricultural land, intentional burning, and water pollution due to the lack of sanitation system in the surrounding communities constitute the main threats for the Güija Complex. A management plan for fisheries resources in the lagoon complex and a management plan for the protected natural area are currently being implemented for conservation actions within this Ramsar Site. Ramsar Site No. 1924. Most recent information: 2010.

Complejo Jaltepeque

Site number: 1,935 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Región Paracentral de El Salvador
Area: 49,474 ha | Coordinates: 13°24'13"N 88°56'10"W | Designation dates: 02-02-2011
View Site details in RSIS

Complejo Jaltepeque is the second biggest brackish water area and intertidal forested wetland in El Salvador. The Site includes a variety of marine and coastal ecosystems such as mangrove forests, sandy beaches, freshwater lagoons, and stationary and permanent rivers. The different ecosystems support a rich diversity of species including 272 plants including the globally threatened mangrove *Avicennia bicolor*, Spanish cedar (*Cedrela odorata*) and big-leaf mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*). The mangrove forest is an essential habitat for the 284 species found in the area, including the yellow-naped amazon (*Amazona auropalliata*), the red knot (*Calidris canutus*), and the great black hawk (*Buteogallus urubitinga*) among others. Also found on the Site are 96 species of fish, 44 land mammals, at least eight amphibians, and 26 reptiles including vulnerable species listed on the IUCN Red List such as the scalloped hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*), the whitenose shark (*Nasolamia velox*), the olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) and the leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*). The Site is a source of artisanal fishing and tourism livelihoods for the surrounding communities. The main threats include deforestation for agriculture and livestock, illegal hunting, and pollution of the waters caused by domestic, agricultural and industrial discharges.

Complejo Los Cobanos

Site number: 2,419 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Sonsonate
Area: 21,312 ha | Coordinates: 13°31'42"N 89°45'28"W | Designation dates: 02-02-2019
View Site details in RSIS

The complex is particularly important as it features the only coral reef formation between Mexico and Costa Rica. The Ramsar Site, which has also been designated as a protected natural area, consists of a rocky beach of volcanic origin, mangroves, coral reefs and open waters. At the Site, threatened ecosystems such as mangroves provide shelter and habitat for endangered species such as the brown sea cucumber (*Isostichopus fuscus*), and vulnerable species such as the leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and the giant seahorse (*Hippocampus ingens*). Los Cobanos is also a nesting site for the critically endangered hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricate*). It is the only place in El Salvador where the reef-forming lobe coral (*Porites lobata*) is found. The Site controls floods while also retaining sediments and toxic materials carried mainly by nearby rivers. The mangrove forest serves as a windbreak barrier and as a carbon sink. Among the main threats to the Site is the presence of unauthorized human settlements.

Embalse Cerrón Grande

Site number: 1,592 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Chalatenango, San Salvador, Cuscatlán, Cabañas
Area: 60,698 ha | Coordinates: 14°03'N 89°04'W | Designation dates: 22-11-2005
View Site details in RSIS

Embalse Cerrón Grande. 22/11/05; Chalatenango, San Salvador, Cuscatlán, Cabañas; 60,698 ha; 14° 03' N 89° 04' W. Artificial water reservoir that constitutes the largest freshwater body in the country. The reservoir provides relevant environmental products and services such as fisheries production and hydropower generation, water filtration and flood control. The site serves as a place of refuge, breeding and resting ground for several thousand waterbirds, both resident and migratory, and hosts the largest duck populations in the country. Apart from having the largest freshwater fish diversity in El Salvador, it hosts 12 of the 14 native fish species known in the country. Other threatened species in the site include paca (Agouti paca), cougar (Puma concolor), ocelot (Leopardus pardalis) and the Red Brocket Deer (Mazama americana). Water pollution and eutrophication, deforestation, erosion, and the presence of water hyacinth (Eichhornia crassipes) constitute the greatest threats to the wetland. Ramsar site no. 1592.Most recent RIS information: 2005.

Laguna de Olomega

Site number: 1,899 | Country: El Salvador | Administrative region: Región Oriental de El Salvador
Area: 7,556.8 ha | Coordinates: 13°18'29"N 88°03'27"W | Designation dates: 02-02-2010
View Site details in RSIS

Laguna de Olomega consists of a lagoon, the largest body of natural fresh water in eastern El Salvador, and two small islets, in addition to a mangrove forest, swamps, and remains of a tropical dry forest. Its ecosystems support a diverse community of species, with over 100 recorded plant species, including 37 aquatic plants and vulnerable species such as the Spanish cedar (*Cedrela odorata*), big-leaf mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) and *Bravaisia integerrima,* a tree of the Acanthus family which is listed as nationally endangered. In terms of fauna, 127 species of birds, 56 mammals, 17 reptiles, 13 fish and five amphibians have been recorded, including vulnerable species such as the American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*), and endangered species like the Geoffroy's spider monkey (*Ateles geoffroyi*) and the Salvador stream frog (*Ptychohyla salvadorensis*). The Site is essential for nearby populations that depend on it for food, as well as flood control and water purification. Among the main threats are water pollution, overfishing, and changes in land use due to the presence of livestock, deforestation and forest fires.