

## Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

1. **Date this sheet was completed/updated:** 2 December 1996

2. **Country:** CHILE

3. **Name of wetland:** Salar del Huasco

4. **Geographical coordinates:**

20°18'S

68°50'W

5. **Altitude:** 3,500 metres above sea level

6. **Area:** approximately 6,000 hectares

7. **Overview:**

This wetland is located on the High Andean sub-desert steppe (Gajardo, 1994). It is a heterogenous vegetative community south of the altiplano on a large plateau surrounded by many mountains. The Salar del Huasco is an enclave in a mountain basin that extends from north to south formed by shallow lakes resulting from the light precipitation in this region (150 to 200 mm/year). Precipitation permits the development of communities of *bofedal*, characteristic of the tundra on the altiplano (Quintanilla, 1987). A wide variety of fauna is found here, making this salt marsh one of the most important areas of biodiversity in the region.

8. **Wetland type:**

seasonal brackish ponds

9. **Ramsar criteria:**

1 (b), 2 (a,b,c), 3(b)

10. **Map of site included? Please tick yes -or- no**

11. **Name and address of the compiler of this form:**

Sección Fauna Silvestre  
U.G. Nacional Patrimonio Silvestre  
Corporación Nacional Forestal

**12. Justification of the criteria selected under point 9, on previous page:**

**13. General location:**

This wetland is in the Tarapaca region, in the province of Iquique, in the municipality of Pica.

**14. Physical features:**

Hydrology: Water in the northern section of the salt marsh is about 4 centimetres deep. In the west where the flamingos nest, the average depth is 17.7 cm.

Chemical analysis of the water in the Salar del Huasco (1995) (Water analyzed at two sampling points)

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**15. Hydrological values:**

No description is available.

**16. Ecological features:**

The largest part of the Salar del Huasco is formed by the salt marsh where the soil does not allow vegetation to grow. In the surrounding areas and along the northeastern edge of the southern lake, there are vegetative formations of steppe composed of kamephytes and nanopharenophytes. This herbaceous-shrub association includes five types of vegetation of the High Andean sub-desert steppe (Gajardo, 1994).

**17. Noteworthy flora:**

Terrestrial flora: The predominant vegetative community in the area is the High Andean sub-desert steppe formed by the following associations.

1. *Pycnophyllum molle/Oxalis exigua*: This association is characterized by alternating clumps of low shrubs, Gramineae and shrubs with small leaves. In many places, the sparse cover creates a desert affect. The following species are found (Gajardo, 1994; Muñoz, 1959):

*coba (Parastephia quadrangularis)*  
*iros (Festuca chrysophylla)*  
*llaretilla (Pynophyllum molle)*  
*ojo de agua (Oxalis exigua)*  
*paposa (Werneria glaberrima)*  
*susurco (Mulinum crassifolium)*  
*viscachera (Stipa venusta)*

2. *Baccharis incarium/Lampaya medicinalis*: This association usually has light density shrubs dominated in several places by clumps of Gramineae (CONAF, 1983; Gajardo, 1994;

Muñoz, 1959). The following species are found in this association:

*añahua* (*Adesmia horrida*)  
*coba* (*Stipa venusta*)  
*iros* (*Festuca chrysophylla*)  
*lampaya* (*Lampaya medicinalis*)  
*pusakayo* (*Opuntia ignescens*)  
*tola* (*Bacchris incarium*)  
*tomillo* (*Junellia seriphioides*)  
*viscachera* (*Parastephia quadrangularis*)

3. *Festuca chrysophylla/Faviana bryoides*: This community is typical of the Puno of the High Andean steppe, and its presence is part of the typical landscape. The following species are found (Gajardo, 1994; Muñoz, 1959):

*añahua* (*Adesmia horrida*)  
*Chuquiraga spinosa*  
*coba* (*Parastephia quadrangularis*)  
*Conyza deserticola*  
*iros* (*Festuca chrysophylla*)  
*lampaya* (*Lampaya medicinalis*)  
*llaretilla* (*Pycnophyllum molle*)  
*pata de pizaca* (*Faviana bryoides*)  
*tola* (*Baccharis incarium*)

Other species found in the vegetative communities in this wetland are:

*Azorella compacta*: This association forms small patches of stunted growth usually associated with the habitat on rocky hill sides and summits (Gajardo, 1994). This species is in danger of extinction (Benoit, 1989).

*Polylepis tarapacana*: Like the *Azorella*, this species has a limited range. This is the southern limit of its distribution (Gajardo, 1994; Rodríguez, et al., 1983). This species is in danger of extinction (Benoit, 1989).

## 18. Noteworthy fauna:

Mammals found in the area around the wetland:

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Birdlife found in the wetland: The following figure gives information on the relative abundance of birdlife in the Salar del Huasco.

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Nests of all these species except for the *Bubo virginianus* have been recorded.

Fish resources: During the same field work, one species of catfish of the *Trichomycterus* genus was recorded.

**19. Social and cultural values:**

The social and cultural importance of the salt marsh derives from its use for small-scale ranching of marginal importance. The salt marsh is also a source of rites and myths in the Aymara culture, especially in relation to local beliefs about several species of fauna and flora normally found in the salt marshes.

**20. Land tenure/ownership of:**

In the reserve, the land is owned by the government. In the surrounding area, the land is private property.

**21. Current land use:**

At the site, the land is not used. In the surrounding area, there is a small amount of ranching of South American ruminants in the *bofedales* surrounding the salt marsh by one family of local inhabitants without affecting the ecology of the salt marsh.

**22. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land use and development projects:**

Among the threats to the ecology of the salt marsh is a project to extract water from the water-table in order to supply the coastal city of Iquique. The Dirección General de Aguas is responsible for carrying out feasibility studies.

Although there is a great deal of mining in the area around the salt marsh, water is not used for these purposes.

The Salar del Huasco is not part of the national system of protected wildlife areas.

**23. Conservation measures taken:**

At no time has the Salar del Huasco been subject to regulations for the conservation of its natural resources.

**24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:**

The Salar del Huasco is included in the population survey of the Project for the Conservation of Flamingos in Northern Chile and the survey of Neotropical waterfowl (CONAF/UNORCH).

**25. Current scientific research and facilities:**

The Salar del Huasco is included in the population survey of the Project for the Conservation of Flamingos in Northern Chile.

**26. Current conservation education:**

There is no visitors' centre and no educational programme at the present time.

**27. Current recreation and tourism:**

Tourists visit the salt marsh occasionally, but there are no statistics available.

**28. Jurisdiction:**

Región I of Tarapaca  
Ministerio de Agricultura  
Secretaría Regional Ministerial de Agricultura  
CONAF Región I

**29. Management authority:**

U.G. Patrimonio Silvestre  
CONAF Región I  
Arica

**30. Bibliographical references:**