

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

As approved by Rec. C. 4.7. of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, Montreux, Switzerland - July 1990

1. **Country:** Iceland
2. **Date:** 19 November 1992
3. **Ref:** 715002
4. **Name and address of compiler:** Gísli Már Gíslason, Institute of Biology, University of Iceland, Grensasvegur 12, IS-108 Reykjavik, Iceland.
5. **Name of wetland:** Thjórsárver
6. **Date of Ramsar designation:** 20 March 1990
7. **Geographical coordinates:** 64°35'N, 19°15'W
8. **General location:** the Central Highlands south of the glacier Hofsjökull.
9. **Area:** 37.500 ha
10. **Wetland type:** M, O, S, T, U, V, Y, Z
11. **Altitude:** 580-1143 m
12. **Overview:** a tundra complex with numerous rivers and lakes.
13. **Physical features:**
 - (a) **water regime:** spring, surface and glacial waters
 - (b) **water depth:** Mostly swamps 0-20 cm, ponds shallow, usually 20-50 cm, not exceeding 1 m.
 - (c) **salinity/acidity:** fresh, pH 6.0-8.9
 - (d) **fluctuations/permanence:** permanent
 - (e) **climatic conditions:** arctic
14. **Ecological features:** tundra meadows intersected by numerous glacial and several spring-fed streams, with numerous pools, ponds and lakes. Swamps and marshes are characterized by sedges (*Carex* spp.). In parts of the area are permafrost palsa mounds.
 - (a) **aquatic vegetation** (including swamps and marshes): higher plants: *Carex lyngbyei*, *C. rostrata*, *C. rariflora*, *Calamagrostis neglecta*, *Callitriche hermaphrodita*, *Potamogeton alpinus*, *P. filiformis*, mosses: *Drepanocladus tundrae*, *Calliergon giganteum*, large alga: *Nitella* sp.
 - (b) **plant communities in adjacent areas:** the area is surrounded by a sand desert
15. **Land tenure/ownership of:**
 - (a) **site:** public with traditional grazing rights of farmers
 - (b) **surrounding area:** public with traditional grazing rights of farmers

16. Conservation measures taken:

(a) **protected areas:** protected by regulation since 1981 (Government paper B, no. 753/1981).

(b) **of surrounding areas:** no protection

17. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented: general planning and land use of the central highlands in preparation

18. Current land use: principal human activities:

(a) **the wetland:**

(b) **surroundings/catchment:** free-range grazing of sheep within the protected area. Diversion of River Thjórsá and formation of several dams for hydroelectric production downstream of the area.

19. Disturbances/threats, including changes in land use and major development projects:

(a) **at the site:** in the 1970's threatened by hydro-electric development project. Damming of the River Thjórsá below the wetlands, which would flood the lowest parts of the wetlands is proposed. The project depends on results of research on possible erosion from proposed reservoir, which could affect higher lying wetlands. If the plan is executed, it will undoubtedly affect the dense breeding areas of Pink-footed goose and change the ecological character of the area. Further diversion of a half of the discharge of the River Thjórsá from the highest lying areas might make the adjacent wetlands dryer.

(b) **surroundings/catchment:**

20. Hydrological and physical values: River Thjórsá is the longest river in Iceland, with three hydroelectric power station in the river or its tributaries. Construction of reservoirs reduces the fluctuations of discharge.

21. Social and cultural values: Thjórsárver tundra meadows form one of the largest oases in the central plateau of Iceland, which is mainly unvegetated.

22. Noteworthy fauna:

(a) **wildlife:**

- **fish:** Three-spined Stickleback (in thermal areas), Arctic charr (in one lake)
- **waterfowl:** the main breeding site for Pink-footed Goose (about 10.000 pairs).
- **other fauna:** Arctic fox

23. Noteworthy flora: flora dominated by sedges (*Carex* spp). In dry southward facing slopes flora is represented by flora more characteristic of the lowlands, especially flowering plants.

24. Current scientific research and facilities: No research station. Major research carried out by scientists from the Institute of Biology, University of Iceland on the vegetation, ground water with the aim of assessing the impact of a reservoir that would flood the lowest lying areas of Thjórsárver.

25. Current conservation education: none

26. Current recreation and tourism: The breeding grounds of the Pink-footed goose is closed to all traffic from 1 May to 10 June.

27. Management authority: Nature Conservation Council manages the nature conservation in the area. Landsvirkjun (Hydroelectric company) manages water discharge.

28. Jurisdiction:

Territorial jurisdiction: Gnúpverjahreppur district council, Ásahreppur district council and Djúpár district council.

Conservation jurisdiction: Ministry of the Environment

29. Bibliographical references:

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30. Reasons for inclusion: 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c

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31. Map of site