

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

1. **Date this sheet was completed/updated:** 5 October 1992

2. **Country:** Morocco

3. **Name of wetland:** Merja Zerga

4. **Geographical coordinates:**

34° 50' North latitude

6° 20' West longitude

5. **Altitude:** Between sea level and 74 metres above sea level

6. **Area:** 7000 hectares

7. **Overview:**

Merja Zerga is a Ramsar site of international importance. Approximately 50 per cent of all ducks wintering in Morocco are found here.

8. **Wetland type:** G, J

9. **Ramsar criteria:** 1a, 2c, 3a, 3c

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

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

Direction des Eaux et Forêts et de la Conservation des Sols

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

13. **General location:**

Merja Zerga is 80 kilometres south of Kénitra and 40 kilometres north of Larache.

14. **Physical features:**

Merja Zerga is located in the Gharb basin, between the two large areas of the Meseta and the Rif. It is a sedimentary environment in a depression (Villafranche formation), the axis of which is the Drader wahdi. Its climate is sub-humid Mediterranean with temperate winters influenced by the ocean. Temperature ranges between 6° and 32° C, and annual rainfall is 650 millimetres.

The lagoon is fed by two permanent freshwater rivers: Drader wahdi and the Nador Canal. It is separated from the ocean by a system of former dunes and is linked to the ocean at the place called Moulay Bouselham.

15. Hydrological values:

The lagoon is linked to the ocean at Moulay Bouselham and is fed by the Drader whadi and the Nador Canal. Maximum depth is 4.5 metres below sea level and the shallowest point is 0.5 metres deep.

16. Ecological features:

There are two types of habitats: brackish swamps with mud with the following species of fish: *mulet*, eels and *loup* and 100 species of birds with between 100,000 and 200,000 wintering birds (ducks and teals). The other type of habitat is swamp with a vegetation of phragmites, salicornes and reeds. Among the fauna are *vanneaux huppés*, *courlis*, *échasse blanche*, *barges*, *herons garde bœufs*.

17. Noteworthy flora: -

18. Noteworthy fauna:

The *hibou des marais africains*, *foulouque à crête*, *courlis à bec grête*, *sarcele marbrée*, Caspian stern and spoonbill.

19. Social and cultural values:

The inhabitants in the reserve are fishermen and traditional farmers. There is also grazing in the area.

20. Land tenure/ownership of:

At the site: The land is in the public domain, and there is public forest.

In the surrounding area: There is collectively owned land and private land.

21. Current land use:

At the site: Fishing from boats

In the surrounding area: Non-mechanized traditional agriculture and grazing

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

At the site: A system for monitoring the status of coastal wetlands has been installed at the level of provincial services, and no changes have been detected so far. The highway linking Casablanca and Tangiers passes near the site, but has had no negative

effects on the site.

In the surrounding area: The town of Moulay Bouselham north of the site has heavy summer tourism.

23. Conservation measures taken:

Management is assured by the Service forestier in Kénitra.

24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

The site lacks a management plan.

25. Current scientific research and facilities:

Research is carried out by the Direction des Eaux et Forêts, the Ecole forestière d'Ingénieurs, the Institut Agronomique, the Institut Scientifique and the Faculté des Sciences, all located in Rabat.

26. Current conservation education:

Groups of school children and the general public are received by the wardens responsible for managing the site, who provide abundant material for visitors on the fauna, especially birds.

27. Current recreation and tourism: This site is important for summer tourism.

28. Jurisdiction: -

29. Management authority:

Ministry for the Environment and Agrarian Reform

30. Bibliographical references:

Badour, N. 1987. Contribution à l'étude physico-chimique de la lagune de Moulay Bouselham. IAV Hassan II, Rabat (Thesis).

Beaubrun, P.C. 1976. La lagune de Moulay Bouselham: Etude hydrodynamique et de sédimentologie. Bulletin de l'Institut Scientifique, Rabat. 22pp.

Bidet, J.C., Carruesco C., Gensous, B.C. 1977. Un milieu sédimentaire actuel: La lagune de Moulay Bouselham. Bulletin de l'Institut Géologique Bassin d'Aquitaine (Bordeaux) 22 pp. 189-230.