

## **WETLAND UNIT**

Contact Details: Mr. S. Pandoo  
Tel No.: 464-4053/ 5251 1984  
Email: [sepandoo8@gmail.com](mailto:sepandoo8@gmail.com)

The Convention on Wetlands also known as the Ramsar Convention defines wetlands as “*Areas of marsh, fen, peat land or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres*”.

Some common names for different types of wetlands are swamp, marsh and bog. Depending on the type of wetland, it may be filled mostly with trees, grasses, shrubs or moss.

To be called a wetland, an area must be filled or soaked with water at least part of the year. Some wetlands are actually dry at certain times of the year.

### **Brief on Ramsar Convention and Ramsar Sites in Mauritius**

The Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. It was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975, and it is the only global environmental treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem (Wetlands).

Mauritius became a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention on 30 September 2001. As a prerequisite to Ramsar Convention, the Government has set up a National Ramsar Committee comprising members from all relevant institutions involved with wetlands to assist the Ministry in implementing the provisions contained in the Ramsar Convention and to advise the Ministry on Wetland development issues. World Wetlands Day is celebrated each with great enthusiasm and dedication to raise awareness on wetland conservation and wise use among the local people, most particularly school community.

The Convention's mission is "the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world".

Each Contracting Parties to this convention are committed to:

- i) Work towards the wise use of all their wetlands through national land-use planning, appropriate policies and legislation, management actions, and public education;
- ii) Designate suitable wetlands for the List of Wetlands of International Importance ("Ramsar List") and ensure their effective management;
- iii) Cooperate internationally concerning transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems, shared species, and monitor development projects that may affect wetlands.

As wetlands are rich in Biodiversity resources in Mauritius, our Government has ratified the Ramsar Convention 30 September on 2001. As such our service is the National Focal Point for Mauritius vis-à-vis the Ramsar Convention.

The following sites in Mauritius have been nominated as Ramsar Site of International Importance:

1. Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary (RTREBS) on 30 Sept. 2001
2. Blue Bay Marine Park (BBMP) on 31 Jan 2008
3. Pointe D'Esny on 16 Sept 2011

### **Rivulet Terre Rouge Estuary Bird Sanctuary (RTREBS)**

RTREBS is the first Ramsar Site of International Importance for Mauritius. The site was proclaimed as a Ramsar Site due to its coastal estuarine characteristics and as a refuge for hundreds of migratory birds that visit Mauritius during the summer months (October – March). About fourteen species of migratory birds originating predominantly from the Northern

Hemisphere (Europe, Norway and Siberia) commonly visit the site as an over wintering ground whilst some vagrant species can also be encountered. They feed on small crustaceans, molluscs, worms and small crabs which occur in large numbers on the mudflat.



Figure 39: Bird Hide



Figure 40: Estuarine mud flat – feeding ground for migratory birds



Figure 41: RTREBS Visitors Centre



Figure 1: Native Garden

This Ramsar Site supports rare and unique faunal and floral biodiversity and provides important climate change mitigation functions such as flood control, sediment trapping and shoreline stabilization.

Given the unique ecological characteristic of the site, RTREBS is also identified as a potential ecotourism site for educational, recreational and scientific activities. The site offers a Visitors Centre Facility for display of posters on migratory birds and other relevant information boards on wetland conservation and wise use for sensitisation and public education. A bird hide was also constructed to facilitate bird watching through telescope at close proximity. A native garden with foot trails and the tortoise pen for display of the giant Aldabra Tortoise is a major recreational site for visitors most particularly school children.

### **Migratory Birds**

The most common migratory birds that visit our island each year during summer are:

- Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)
- Crab Plover (*Dromas ardeola*)
- Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)
- Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*)
- Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)
- Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)
- Lesser Sandplover (*Charadrius mongolus*)
- Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)
- Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)
- Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)
- Striated Heron (*Butorides striatus*)
- Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)
- Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*)
- Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)



**Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)**



The Bar-tailed Godwit is fairly large, with up-curved long billed and long legs. It is a winter visitor and passage migrant in the estuary at Terre-Rouge. The bird likes sandy and muddy shores where they hunt for food.

**Crab Plover (*Dromas ardeola*)**



The Crab Plover bird has a black and white plumage. The bird has relatively long black bill and long legs. These birds hunt mollusks and crabs, which they then break up by pounding them with their heavy bills.

**Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)**



The Common Greenshank is medium-sized with a long decurved bill and long legs. It has white and grey to brown feathers. The bird feeds on small fish, insects and larvae, crustaceans, amphibians and occasionally on rodents.



**Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)**



The Common tern is white and has a black-capped forehead. It has long narrow wings without black tips and forked tails. The bird feeds on fish and aquatic invertebrates. It is mostly found in Europe.

**Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)**



The bird is medium-sized and has long black bill and long legs. The male has striking chestnut-red head. The bird feeds on poorly vegetated wetland fringes, wet mud and small worms.

**Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)**



The bird has white and brown feathers. This mixture of colours makes small white patches on the bird's body. The bird feeds on worms, insects and mollusk. The bird comes from Artic, Alaska and Russia.

**Lesser Sandplover (*Charadrius mongolus*)**



The Lesser Sand Plover is a medium-sized bird. It has white to grey-brown feathers with relatively long bill and long legs. The bird feeds on small insects, mollusks, crustaceans and worms.



**Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)**



The Little Stint is a tiny wading bird with a short straight fine black bill and medium-length black legs. It has brownish-grey upper parts and white under parts. The bird feeds on small invertebrates which are found in the mud.

**Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)**



The Sanderling is a small wading bird. It has a short straight black bill and medium length black legs. It has pale grey feathers above and a white plumage underneath. The bird has a black mark at its shoulder where the folded wing meets the body. The bird feed on invertebrates which are buried in the mud.

**Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)**



The Common Sandpiper is easily recognised by its constant bobbing walk and short legs. Moreover, it has white and brown feathers. The bird normally holds its head low and swings its tail up and down. They feed on insects, worms and molluscs.

**Striated Heron (*Butorides striatus*)**



The Striated Heron has a brownish grey to black feathers. It has a long bill and yellow legs. The bird feeds on small fish, amphibians, insects, shellfish, crabs, frogs and aquatic insects.



**Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)**



The Ruddy Turnstone is medium-size. It has with brown, white and black feathers with a short pointed black bill and orange-red legs. They stir up and turn stone over to find invertebrates to feed on.

**Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*)**



The Terek Sandpiper has a pale brownish-grey plumage with finer dark streaking on the upper body, head and sides of breast. The bird has a white plumage on the under parts. Their feet are orange to orange-yellow, their eyes are brown and they have a long black bill. The bird feeds on insects and other mobile prey which it hunts from the water surface.

**Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)**



The Whimbrel is brown and has a long neck and a long beak which allow them to haunt muddy sandy shores and salty marshes. The birds often eat crab, worms and small animals which are found in shallow water. These birds originate from Europe.

## Blue Bay Marine Park (BBMP)

The Blue Bay Marine Park harbours a marine ecosystem of rich biodiversity in marine fauna and flora especially in terms of its coral assemblage and thus designated as the second Ramsar Site of International Importance on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008.



Figure 2: Blue Bay Marine Park



Figure 3: *Montipora aequituberculata* corals located at Blue Bay Marine Park

This Ramsar Site is recognised for its exceptional underwater seascape and unique coral garden treasuring high coral species diversity. About 38 coral species representing 28 genera and 15 families and some 72 fish species have been recorded. The patch reef of the lagoon is spectacular supporting coral reef community with luxuriant coral growth of approximately 4 hectares and the only location where convoluted *Montipora aequituberculata* has been recorded. Dense growth of table corals, cactus corals, staghorn corals, and fire corals alternate and co-exist.



## Pointe D'Esny

The Pointe d'Esny wetland (21.5 Ha) is one of the rare and largest remaining wetlands of Mauritius situated in the South Eastern village of Mahebourg and designated as the Third Ramsar Site of International Importance on 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2011. The site characterized as a natural coastal wetland supports a rich mangrove forests (*Rhizophora mucronata* and *Bruguiera gymnorrhiza* mangrove species), the critically endangered *Zornia vaughaniana* plant, coastal fishes, crustacean, migratory and shore birds and provides local flood abatement functions.

Pointe d'Esny Ramsar Site offers sustainable ecotourism and recreational services to local people and tourists.



Figure 4: Mangrove forests at Pointe D'Esny