



Fifth Ramsar Site for the United Arab Emirates

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United Arab Emirates



The U.A.E. has designated its fifth Wetland of International Importance, a very interesting salt

dome island belonging to the emirate of Sharjah lying some 65 km off the coast of Dubai. As summarized by Ms Samridhi Rijal, Ramsar Assistant Advisor for Asia-Oceania, based on the accompanying Ramsar Information Sheet, the Sir Bu Nair Island Protected Area site (4,964 hectares; 25°13'55"N 054°13'09"E) includes the island itself, formed from regional tectonic activities and rich in minerals, with a terrestrial area of 1,333 ha, surrounded by extensive and healthy coral reef amounting to 3,631 ha within the site limits. Despite its small size, the site supports a high biodiversity for the biogeographic region. A total of 40 coral species and 76 reef fish species have been recorded, including seven coral species that are Red Listed as Vulnerable. The site is an important nesting site for the Critically Endangered Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), and it supports more than 1% of the regional breeding population of the Sooty gull (*Larus hemprichii*).

The island is of historical importance as pottery has been found dating back to about 3,500 years ago. It also used to be a meeting point for fishermen and a base for pearl divers. The island was declared a National Protected Area in 2000 and visits are permitted only for environmental surveys and studies. There is a plan to develop a limited area of the site for commercial tourism.

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