

Netherlands completes updating of Ramsar Sites

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Netherlands



Markermeer & IJmeer

The Netherlands has now published updated information on all of its Ramsar Sites (excluding some of those in the Kingdom's Caribbean territories). Site boundaries have been defined and measured more precisely, and some Sites have been renamed or merged so they correspond with the boundaries of Natura 2000 sites. These changes mean that the Sites are also protected under the European Union's Birds and Habitats Directives.

The five Sites updated most recently are described below. Information on all the Netherlands' Sites can be found on the Ramsar Sites Information Service [here](#).

Zwanenwater en Pettemerduinen ([Site no. 400](#), previously named "Zwanenwater") is a coastal wetland dominated by humid dune-slacks, marshes, woodland and two connected freshwater lakes, which are among the largest of their kind in Europe. The Ramsar Site name and boundary have been adjusted to the proposed Natura 2000 site.

These ecosystems support a rich and vulnerable vegetation as well as endangered species of waterbirds such as the Eurasian bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Eurasian spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* and lesser white-fronted goose *Anser erythropus*. The Site is an integral part of the North Sea dunes which protect the Netherlands against the North Sea.



Zwanenwater en Pettemerduinen

Land use is dedicated to tourism, military training, water management, dams, reservoirs and hydro-electric generation. Two birdwatching hides are located at the Site, and a national monitoring programme is coordinated by the Dutch Bird Research Organisation. The military training puts pressure on the ecological character of the Site and causes bird disturbance.

Markermeer (previously [Site no. 1249](#)) and IJmeer have been merged into [Site no. 1245](#), which is now named Markermeer & IJmeer. The combined Site is a stagnant freshwater lake with submerged vegetation in the catchment of the river Rhine, which was separated from IJsselmeer by the closing of Houtribdijk in 1976. The Site follows the Natura 2000 boundary.

The Site is of international importance for a large number

of breeding and non-breeding birds, supporting regularly more than 20,000 wintering waterbirds, with an average peak number of almost 105,000 for the period from 2005/2006 to 2009/2010. Large resting groups of common pochard, tufted duck and common coot gather in relatively small areas. The lake is also an important spawning, nursery and feeding ground for fish and molluscs, and plays an important role as a freshwater reservoir for irrigation.

Human activities include boating, tourism, extractive operations, commercial fisheries, shipping traffic, water management, conservation and research. The main threats potentially affecting the Site's ecological character relate to aquaculture and fisheries activities, plans to increase the capacity of recreational harbours, and eutrophication. Long-term monitoring has, however, shown a decrease in eutrophication and chemical water contamination and an increase in submerged vegetation. New habitat for birds such as gulls and terns have been created, which require intense nature management.



Weerribben

Wieden ([Site no. 1241](#), previously named "De Wieden") is characterized by shallow freshwater lakes, reed beds, fens, wet meadows, transition mires, quaking bogs, forested peatland and numerous canals created through peat extraction activities in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Ramsar Site boundary has been adjusted to that of the Natura 2000 site. Together, Wieden and the adjoining Weerribben ([Site no. 193](#)) form the largest peat swamp of its kind in Western Europe.

The Site regularly supports more than 20,000 wintering waterbirds and is also a refuge for more than 1% of the biogeographic populations of three waterbird species. It also supports notable species of plants, fish and butterflies. There is a healthy otter population which was reintroduced in 2002.

The lakes act as water storage reservoirs during the summer and provide water for irrigation. The main human activities relate to tourism, angling, boating, commercial fisheries, farming and reed harvesting. The main threats to the Site derive from drainage and nutrient pollution from intensive farming in the surrounding polders.

Zoommeer ([Site no. 1253](#)) is a stagnant freshwater lake disconnected from the Oosterschelde estuary by a dam constructed in 1986. It forms a hydrological unit with Ramsar Site Krammer-Volkerak (Site no. 747) through the Rhine-Schelde canal. The Ramsar Site boundary has been adjusted to the Natura 2000 boundaries and the Molenplaat area, although it is not included under Natura



Zoommeer

2000, has been maintained within the Ramsar Site.

The wetland is in the process of changing from a marine tidal system into a stagnant freshwater lake resulting in changes in the flora and fauna composition. The Site is of international importance for threatened breeding waterbirds such as the Mediterranean gull, common tern and avocet. It also supports more than 1% of the individuals of the North-West European population of the gadwall.

The primary human activities relate to boating, commercial fisheries, shipping traffic, tourism, dairy farming and water management. The main threats affecting the ecological character of the Site include non-industrial pollution leading to an increase in eutrophication and intensive livestock grazing.

Oostelijke Vechtplassen (**Site no. 1275**) consists of an extensive area of permanent freshwater shallow lakes, marshes and canals and characterized by fenland, reedbeds and wet meadows surrounded by swamp forests. The boundaries of the Site have been adjusted to those of the Natura 2000 site.

The high turbidity of the water bodies prevents the development of submerged vegetation; however, water management measures have considerably improved the water quality. The Site is of international importance for providing refuge to large number of rare and endangered species of mushrooms, mosses, plants, molluscs, insects, fish, birds and mammals. It regularly supports more than 20,000 wintering waterbirds and more than 1% of the individuals of the North-West and Central European populations of Northern shoveler and purple heron. Since 2010 otters have again been breeding on the Site.

The main human activities include boating, commercial fisheries, water management, tourism and farming. The Site is threatened by drainage and nutrient pollution from the surrounding farmland, by reed harvesting activities, and by recreational navigation.