

Xuan Thuy National Park

Alternative site name(s)

None

Province(s)

Nam Dinh

Area

7,100 ha

Coordinates

20°11' - 20°16'N, 106°29' - 106°37'E

Agro-ecological zone

Red River Delta

Decreed by government

Yes

Management board established

Yes

Investment plan prepared

Yes

VCF eligibility criteria met

A, B, C

Social screening criteria met

None

Conservation needs assessment prepared

No

Operational management plan prepared

No

Tracking tool completed

No

Map available

Yes

Management history

Xuan Thuy National Park is located in Giao Thuy district, Nam Dinh province (formerly Xuan Thuy district, Nam Ha province). On 6 August 1988, the government of Vietnam nominated Xuan Thuy wetlands as the country's first Ramsar Site, by Official Letter No. 1302/KG of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Anon. 1993). Xuan Thuy was designated as a Ramsar Site by the Bureau of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) on 20 September 1988, with an area of 12,000 ha (Ramsar 2000). On 20 January 1989, Vietnam became a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention (Anon. 1993).

In 1993, an investment plan was prepared by FIPI, which proposed establishing a 5,640 ha nature reserve (Anon. 1993). On 5 September 1994, the establishment of Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve was decreed by Official Letter 4893/KGVX of the government of Vietnam, with an area of 7,100 ha (MARD 1997). A revised investment plan for the nature reserve was approved by the former Ministry of Forestry on 19 January 1995, by Decision No. 26/KH-LN (Nam Dinh Provincial FPD *in litt.* 2000). Following the approval of the revised investment plan, a management board was established by the former Nam Ha Provincial People's Committee on 1 October 1995.

Subsequently, the management category of Xuan Thuy was revised from nature reserve to national park, following Decision No. 01/TTg of the Prime Minister, dated 2 January 2003. Xuan Thuy National Park is under the management of Nam Dinh Provincial People's Committee. On 20 October 2003, a new investment plan for Xuan Thuy National Park was approved by decision No. 2669/QD-UB of Nam Dinh Provincial People's Committee.

The national park management board currently has six members of staff based at the headquarters. The management board is under the management of Nam Dinh Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (Nguyen Viet Cach, Director of Xuan Thuy National Park *in litt.* 2003).

Xuan Thuy is included on a list of Special-use Forests to be established by the year 2010, prepared by the FPD of MARD, as a 7,100 ha national park (FPD 2003); this list has not yet been approved by the government.

Topography and hydrology

Xuan Thuy National Park is situated in the coastal zone of the Red River Delta, at the mouth of the main channel of the Red River, known as the Ba Lat river. The site comprises three islands and intervening intertidal mudflats. Ngan island, the largest island, consists mainly of aquacultural ponds, most of which

contain mangrove. Lu island consists of a large sandy area, as well as coastal marshes and a small area of aquacultural ponds. Xanh island, the smallest, is a thin sandy island, which is still increasing in size as a result of deposition of sediment carried by the Red River. This island, together with parts of Luu island, is submerged at high tide.

The southern boundary of the national park is formed by the estuary of the Vop river. The maximum elevation at the site is only about 3 m, while the marine part of the site reaches depths of up to 6 m below sea level.

Biodiversity values

Xuan Thuy National Park supports a total of 14 habitat types, including both natural and man-made ones (Pedersen and Nguyen Huy Thang 1996). The habitat types with the greatest biodiversity value are undisturbed mudflats and natural mangroves. The dominant mangrove species is *Kandelia candel*, although a few *Sonneratia caseolaris* have been planted, and *Aegiceras corniculatum* and *Acanthus ilicifolius* have spread naturally (Pedersen and Nguyen Huy Thang 1996). Much of the mature mangrove at the site has been enclosed within aquacultural ponds, although large areas of mudflat in the south of the site have been planted with a monoculture of *K. candel*. In 1996, a 300 ha *Phragmites* sp. reedbed occurred in aquacultural ponds on Ngan island (Pedersen and Nguyen Huy Thang 1996). However, this reedbed had largely disappeared by 2000 (J. Eames verbally 2000). Luu island supports extensive *Casuarina equisetifolia* plantations, which are an important habitat for migratory passerines.

As a result of its habitat diversity and relative intactness, Xuan Thuy National Park is an important staging and wintering area for migratory waterbirds. During surveys in 1988 (Scott *et al.* 1989) and 1994 (Pedersen *et al.* 1996), more than 20,000 waterbirds were observed. During the spring of 1996, it was estimated that more than 33,000 shorebirds passed through the national park (Pedersen and Nguyen Huy Thang 1996).

Eight species of globally threatened and near-threatened birds regularly occur at the national park in significant numbers: Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea*

minor, Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi*, Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, and Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* (Tordoff 2002). Of greatest note, Xuan Thuy supports the largest wintering population of Black-faced Spoonbill in Vietnam; maximum counts of 50 birds have been made at the site in recent years (Tordoff 2002). Moreover, Xuan Thuy supports internationally important congregations of a number of commoner migratory waterbirds, including Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* and Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*. For these reasons, Xuan Thuy qualifies as an Important Bird Area (Tordoff 2002).

Conservation issues

Despite the fact that Xuan Thuy National Park is Vietnam's only Ramsar Site, it has insufficient funding, infrastructure and equipment, and the staff have limited training. Consequently, the ability of the national park staff to plan and implement appropriate wetland management is constrained, and some management practices at the site are incompatible with biodiversity conservation. Most seriously, mudflats, which are the preferred feeding habitat of Black-faced Spoonbill, Saunders's Gull, Spoon-billed Sandpiper and several other globally threatened bird species, are being planted with mangrove, with the objectives of land reclamation and foreshore protection. This is changing the nature of the substrate, and threatening to make these areas unsuitable for the globally threatened bird species (Yu and Swennen 2001). Furthermore, sandy islands in the national park, which support dune and saltmarsh vegetation, are being afforested with the Australasian exotic tree species *Casuarina equisetifolia*, resulting in a reduction in the area of natural habitat.

Additional threats to biodiversity at Xuan Thuy are the steady intensification of aquaculture, which is leading to a die-back of emergent vegetation, and unsustainable levels of fishing and shellfish collection in the intertidal zone, which may be disturbing globally threatened bird species, either directly or indirectly. These threats arise from the high population density in

the national park buffer zone (575 people per km²), shortages of agricultural land, and economic pressures. However, they also reflect a lack of appreciation among key stakeholders of the ecological and economic importance of wetlands in the context of regional development.

In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the national park, three things are necessary. Firstly, a programme of training for national park staff. Secondly, a management plan that balances the economic, coastal protection and biodiversity values of different habitat types and promotes environmentally sustainable land-use practices. Thirdly, a financing mechanism for the national park that reduces the dependence of national park managers on funds for mangrove afforestation, an activity which is incompatible with conservation of mudflats and the globally threatened bird species that depend on them.

Other documented values

Xuan Thuy National Park is of considerable importance for fisheries production. In the former Xuan Thuy district as a whole, about 200 tonnes of shrimps, 50 tonnes of crabs and 1,200 tonnes of molluscs were produced in 1987. The national park contains a large area of aquacultural ponds, and many people collect shellfish on the intertidal mudflats. The production of honey used to be important for the local economy. In 1988, the honey output of the area reached 50 tonnes per year, with bees feeding on mangrove nectar. By 1993, this had fallen sharply to 10 to 15 tonnes per year, due to loss of mangrove following aquacultural pond construction (Anon. 1993).

Xuan Thuy National Park receives few visitors at the present time. However, as Vietnam's first Ramsar Site, Xuan Thuy National Park has high potential as a site for ecotourism, public education and training of forest protection staff from other wetland protected areas.

Related projects

Prior to 1999, the national 327 Programme was the main source of investment funding for the activities of the management board. Since 1999, the national 661

Programme has replaced the 327 Programme as the most important source of investment funding.

Since 2001, BirdLife International and the national park management board have implemented a series of one-year projects, with support from the Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund. The activities of these projects have included establishing an ecological monitoring programme for the national park.

The Mangrove Ecology and Research Division of the Centre for Natural Resources and Environment Studies is currently developing a medium-sized Global Environment Facility project entitled *Conservation of Coastal Wetlands in the Red River Delta, Vietnam*. It is proposed that this project will be implemented at five sites in Ninh Binh, Nam Dinh and Thai Binh provinces. The aim of the project will be the long-term conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the coastal zone of the Red River Delta.

Conservation needs assessment

A conservation needs assessment has not been conducted for the site.

Operational management plan

An operational management plan has not been prepared for the site.

Eligibility against VCF criteria

Xuan Thuy is eligible for VCF support because it meets criteria A, B and C.

Criterion	Eligibility
A _I	
A _{II}	VN017 - Xuan Thuy
B _I	Decision No. 01/TTg, dated 02/01/03
B _{II}	National Park
B _{III}	Under provincial management
C _I	Management board established
C _{II}	

Social screening requirements

A social screening report has not been prepared for the site.

Criterion	Eligibility
A	
B	
C	
D	

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