The maritime zones and land areas protected by le Conservatoire du littoral comprise over 300,000 acres, including more than 600 miles of shoreline in metropolitan France and its Overseas Departments and Collectivities.
The preservation of terrestrial zones

Le Conservatoire du littoral in Saint Martin

Saint Martin: between land and sea

The island of Saint Martin, located in the Lesser Antilles, between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, measures 33 square miles. Part Dutch, part French, the island has 40,000 residents living in the 20 square miles that make up the French Territorial Collectivity. A popular tourist destination, Saint Martin attracts almost three million visitors per year, of which one million visit the natural terrestrial and maritime sites found on the French side of the island. Although it was subjected to uncontrolled development, for years, the coastline still remains exceptional today and is worth preserving and sharing with the public: coastal brush forests, cliffs, coral reefs, mangroves, beaches…

Le Conservatoire du littoral in Saint Martin

Thanks to an active land acquisition program, the Conservatoire du littoral ensures the protection of more than 800 acres of ponds, and wooded, sandy, and rocky shorelines, found throughout the 15 natural sites along the French coastline of the island.

With the help of the elected members of the Collectivity and the National Nature Reserve Management Association, le Conservatoire has instituted a plan to improve certain areas of the coastline and to ensure their protection during usage by the following means: restoration of damaged ecosystems; management of sites and their public access; botanical trails, viewing points, instructive tours… Additional endangered sites are under negotiation or are in process of being acquired.

Integrated management

Managing and preserving the land, regulating marine protection, and site management are all essential, in order to protect vulnerable coastal areas. To implement and co-ordinate the shared management of the shoreline, the site administrators and the Saint Martin National Nature Reserve must work closely together in strong partnership.

Map of protected zones and measures for the conservation of natural areas

Saint Martin

Ponds protected by le Conservatoire du littoral and under the protection of a biotope protection order

Saint Martin: the Hawksbill Sea Turtle, the green sea turtle (Chelonia mydas), and the leatherback sea turtle. Between March and October, these turtles lay their eggs on certain secluded beaches: Guianan, Grandes Cayes, and Petites Cayes.

Focus on Marine Turtles

Three species of marine turtles are found in Saint Martin: the Hawksbill Sea Turtle, the green sea turtle (Chelonia mydas), and the leatherback sea turtle. Between March and October, these turtles lay their eggs on certain secluded beaches: Guianan, Grandes Cayes, and Petites Cayes.

Focus on Turk’s Head Cactus

Turk’s head cactus (Meliocactus intortus), a species endemic to the Lesser Antilles, is protected by a governmental decree, that was issued on December 26th 1988. Characteristic of dry climates, this cactus has a globose stem with vertical ribs and a cylindrical cephalium which can grow up to three feet high. The seeds inside the fruit it bears reproduce.
The islets, isolated ecosystems

The island of Saint Martin comprises many ponds and lagoons, most of which are surrounded by mangroves. These areas play an important role in the ecology of the island: channelization of rain water; filtering of alluvial silt, water purification, and a refuge and breeding ground for marine fauna and birds... 85 species of birds frequent these humid areas for reproduction, feeding, or resting during periods of migration. These zones have been, and continue to be damaged by the thoughtless activities of mankind: landfill, dumping of dirty water, trash collection, sewage and bad drainage, and clearing land of trees... To reduce the pressure put on these natural sites, the ponds at Salines d’Orient and the étang aux Poissons were classified for protection by the National Nature Reserve in 1998. Since 2007, decrees have been issued for the protection of the biotope and regulating human activities on the 16 ponds on the French side of the island. On February 2, 2007, 14 ponds were transferred to le Conservatoire du littoral via a governmental decree to reinforce their protection. The establishment of a path raised on stilts in the mangrove at the Barrier at Cul de Sac pond allows continued observation of this remarkable and fragile ecosystem.

Among the sites... The pond of étang aux Poissons and its mangrove forest

Located on the eastern side of Saint Martin, the étang aux Poissons covers an area of 186 acres, and features the last large mangrove forest remaining on the island. A typical forested ecosystem found in tropical tidal areas, a mangrove forest is made up of dense vegetation adapted to brackish water, and includes various members of the mangrove family. Especially dense around the étang aux Poissons and the Salines d’Orient, both of which are classified as Natural Reserves, the mangroves comprise an essential habitat for birds, fish, and shellfish: the mangroves serve as a place of refuge, feeding, and reproduction.

Focus on marine mammals

Of the 33 species of marine mammals that frequent the waters of the Caribbean, some are occasionally seen in the shallow, protected zones around Saint Martin: humpback whales—Megaptera novaeangliae—come to reproduce from January to May, along with the bottlenose dolphin, or Tursiops truncatus. In 2009, Saint Martin should become part of a marine mammal sanctuary that will encompass the entire Caribbean archipelago.

Focus on plant beds, marine flowering plants, and coral

Marine flowering plants create veritable “underwater prairies” that are of primordial importance since they oxygenate the water through the process of photosynthesis. They also help maintain the clarity of the water thanks to the trapping of sediment. Coral creates a nursery zone for many different species, especially corals, white sea urchins, and a variety of fish, such as the surgeonfish, the parrot fish, and perch...

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Writing and design:
le Conservatoire du littoral/Overseas,
Bayard Nature et Territoires
Printing: Calligraphy print (36)
Cover Photo: M. Cerles/CDL
Map: fonds Réserve naturelle de Saint Martin

downloadable brochure on www.reservenaturelle-saint-martin.com