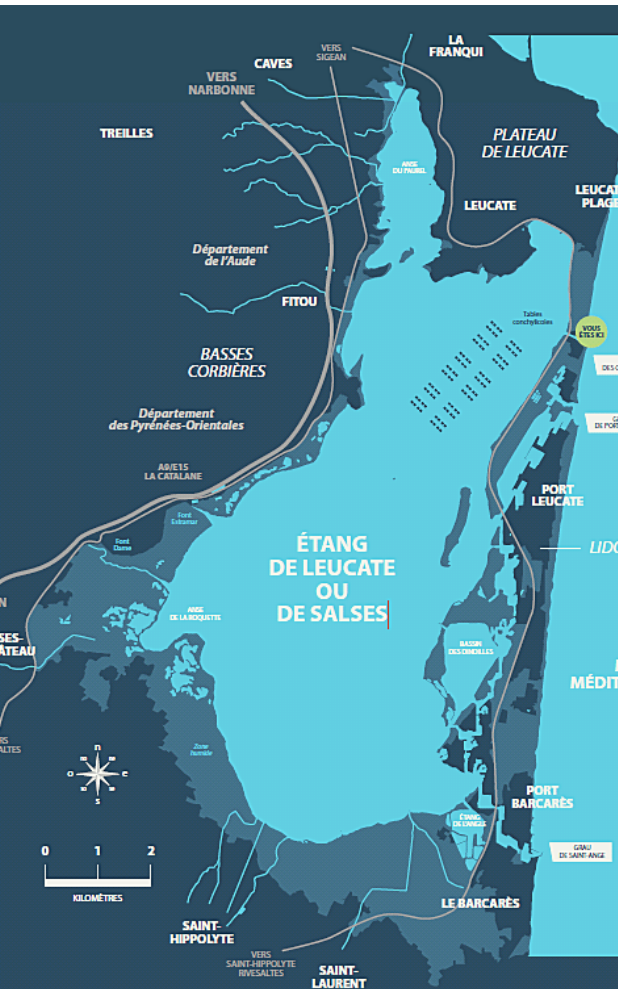


The Salses-Leucate lagoon

The Salses-Leucate lagoon extends over 5,400 hectares, closing a narrow pass between the Corbières and the Roussillon plain. It is the 2nd largest coastal lagoon of Languedoc-Roussillon in area as well as 2nd in shellfish farming activity.

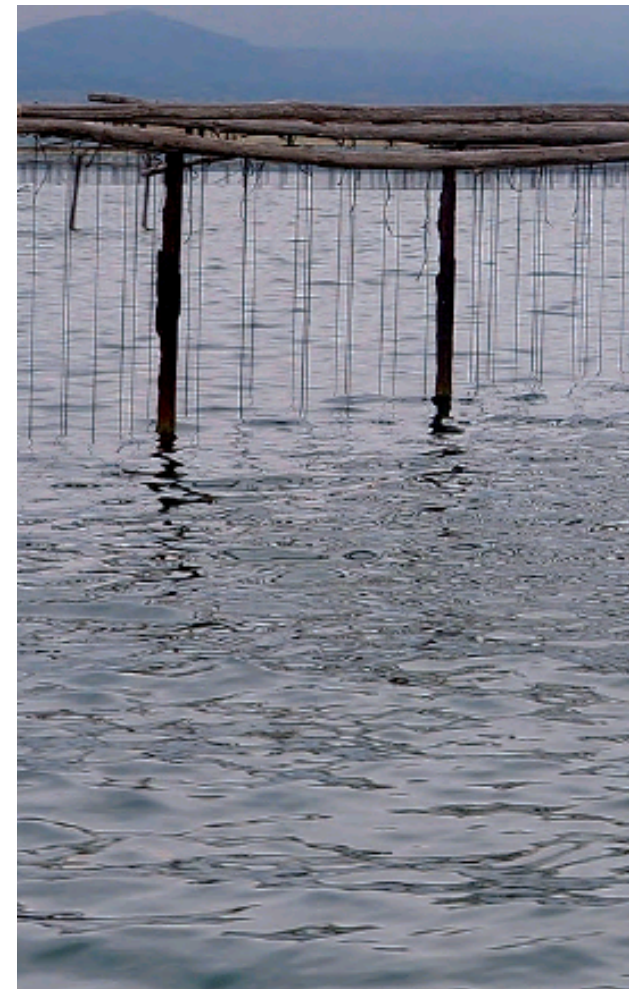


Faintly marked by human activity on the majority of its periphery, the lagoon constitutes a remarkable environment where the traditional activities of fishing and shellfish farming show us that humans can live in harmony with nature.



It was this spirit, and in the frame of the European project LIFE+LAG'Nature, that this exposition was conceived.

We hope that it helps you to better understand and appreciate this site.



A management plan, combining public and private actors, has been created to protect this fragile equilibrium and the patrimony that we have a responsibility to continue.

The lagoon, a useful area

This body of water is not a pond, but in fact a lagoon. Lagoons are shallow areas of salt or brackish* waters and are parallel to the shore. They are separated from the sea by a narrow sandbar (lido) and communicate generally by canals, temporary or persistent, natural or manmade.

**mixture of fresh and salt water in varying proportions*



The mix of fresh and salt waters create a plethora of absolutely unique ecosystems that are of the greatest biological and ecological interest. They are a nursery for fish, crustaceans, mollusks and numerous bird species.

The lagoons, true receptacles of inputs from watersheds, are naturally rich environments that fulfill many functions that benefit humans :

- They contribute to the purification of waters from the watershed, which is important for water quality for swimmers.



- They support fishing, shellfish farming and aquaculture.
- They foster the discovery of natural environments and are often used as sites for leisure and sport activities.



A lagoon to protect

Between the land and the sea, Mediterranean lagoons and dunes are home to a diversity of remarkable habitats and species, both in flora and fauna. Their significant ecological interest is recognised at the European level.



Uniting the Salses-Leucate lagoon is a set of diverse themes, including the ecological quality of the lagoon, its marine activities with respect to the local economy, and its landscapes, which have framed the collaboration between public and private enterprises for many years.

With the presence of lagoons in this territory, the Languedoc-Roussillon has a major role to play in the preservation and restoration of these environments that contribute to the physical and ecological equilibrium of the entire coastline.

The importance of the issues of preservation is clearly perceived by the habitants, economic actors and elected representatives of this territory, who are at the heart of the deliberations and actions.

History

The site has been occupied by humans since the Neolithic era. It is situated in the heart of a strategic area for the circulation of goods ... and their control.



***It was even exposed to Moorish pirates until the beginning of the 19th century.**

Wild and unwelcoming, but extremely coveted and open to all invasions*, the Languedocian coast didn't resemble its current profile until the middle of the 20th century, through the creation of the large seaside resorts including Leucate Plage, Port Leucate and Port Barcarès on its western edge.

Once upon a time

After the era of turmoil, humans lived peacefully around the Salse-Leucate Lagoon. It was a simple, rustic life, punctuated only by the seasons, fishing, wine cultivation and breeding livestock.

Farming-fishermen or fishing-farmers ? With a bit of gardening and some orchards, the families were able to live and change with the seasons. This continued until the arrival of tourism and the effects of Mission Racine.



"Mission Racine", the coastal construction

Before the 60s, tourism had been taking its first steps here. The adventure began in 1912... with 7 villas constructed in front of the sea at Leucate.



The flux of tourists towards Spain, the excessive development of the Côte d'Azur, the wine-growing crisis and the influx of pieds-noirs returnees (Algerian-born French repatriates), these are all the problems that the mission wanted to solve.



Some furnished flats, some seaside establishments, and then, the revolution!

At the start of the 60s, leisure and free time activities were just developing, and the Languedocien coast was still a "marshy desert".



That ambitious program of tourism development was launched by the government of General Gaulle . It was the inter-departmental mission of the Languedoc-Roussillon coast.



Because of him we have Port-Camargue, Grande-Motte, Cap d'Agde, Gruissan, Port-Leucate and Saint-Cyprien!



It's better known as Mission Racine, named after Pierre Racine, coordinator of this operation for over 20 years, and truly the "father" of our resorts.



The « Cap Leucate » oyster

The Salses-Leucate lagoon is one of two oyster basins along the French Mediterranean coast. Officially the activity of oyster farming began recently, only in 1963.



Today the oyster industry sustains 23 companies, ranking just after tourism and viticulture. The oyster is known as « Cap Leucate », a collective brand created in 1992. The Cap Leucate are cupped oysters, with firm flesh that tastes of hazelnut, among which 80 % are sold in direct marketing.



Before this time, some rare oysters grew here and their exploitation was limited to collecting them from some natural benches.



The oyster

The oyster is member of the Ostreida family. It is a bivalve* lamellibranchia** mollusk, without a head, which lives in marine or brackish habitats. Its gills have a double function : breathing and filtration.



*Mollusk with two distinct, connected, mobile and globally symmetric shells.
** Gills forming small strips.



The cilia on the gills create a stream that carries the floating food particles (mainly microscopic algae) towards the digestive system of the oyster. The oyster is a cyclic hermaphrodite. In fact, from one year to the next, it begins as a female, thereafter assuming the sex of the male.

It can produce anywhere from 200,000 to 400,000 larvae a year. Eight hours after fertilization, a naked larva appears. The larva's shell forms after 24 hours, and the larva remains in this planktonic state for two to three weeks.



Water and Life

Salty, fresh, or brackish waters, seagrass meadows or open water, this lagoon is home to environments that support a multitude of animal and vegetation species.

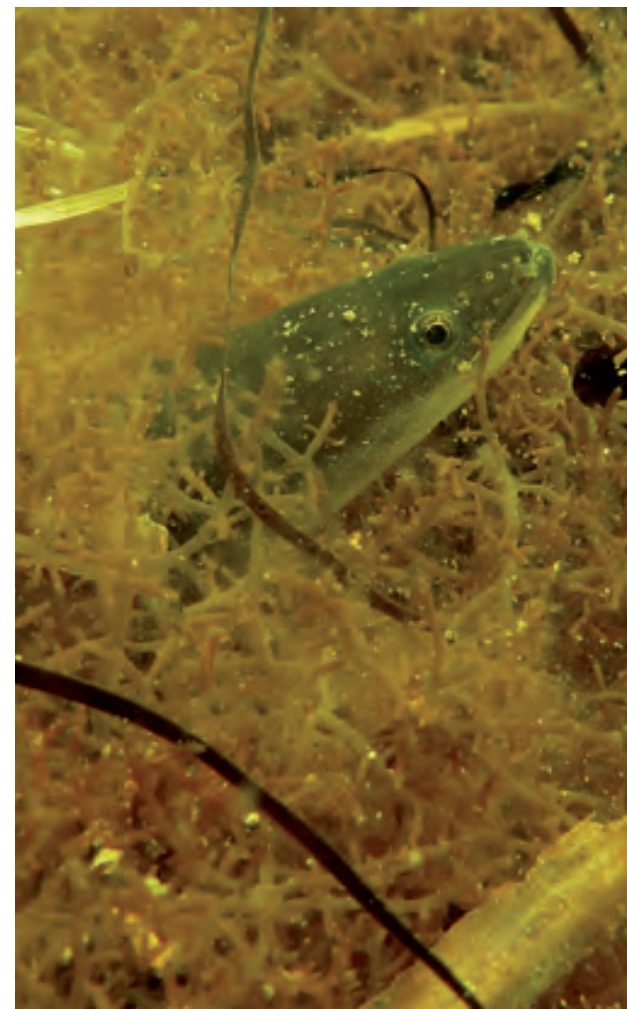


Strongly impacting the biodiversity, this can also have an impact on the local economy, especially fishing and shellfish farming.

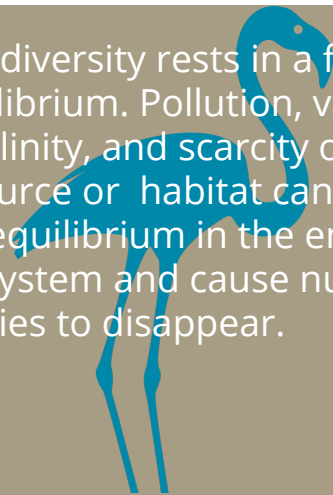


Fish

The lagoon is a favorable environment for numerous species. There they find a well-stocked pantry and calm, warm waters, all ideal conditions for reproduction or juvenile growth. Alongside juveniles, saltwater fish migrate there punctually.



This diversity rests in a fragile equilibrium. Pollution, variation in salinity, and scarcity of a resource or habitat can alter the equilibrium in the entire ecosystem and cause numerous species to disappear.



Coastal lagoon habitats

With 2,000 hectares of peripheral wetlands, the Salses-Leucate lagoon presents a large diversity of habitats specifically adapted to flora and fauna based on water salinity, the types of soils... and the impact of human activity.

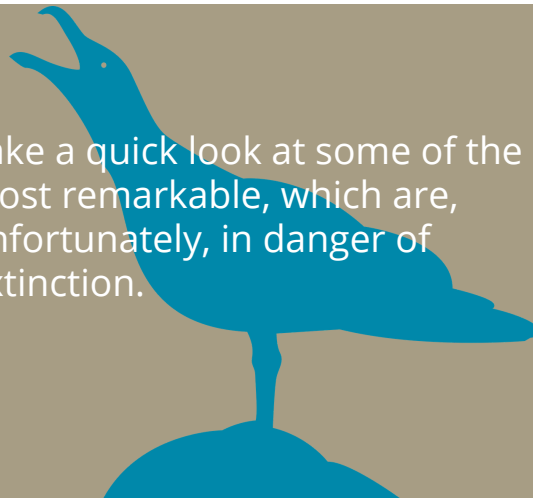


Fauna

This lagoon complex is an important conservation site for fauna, where numerous protected species, including 28 listed in the European Habitats Directive can be found.

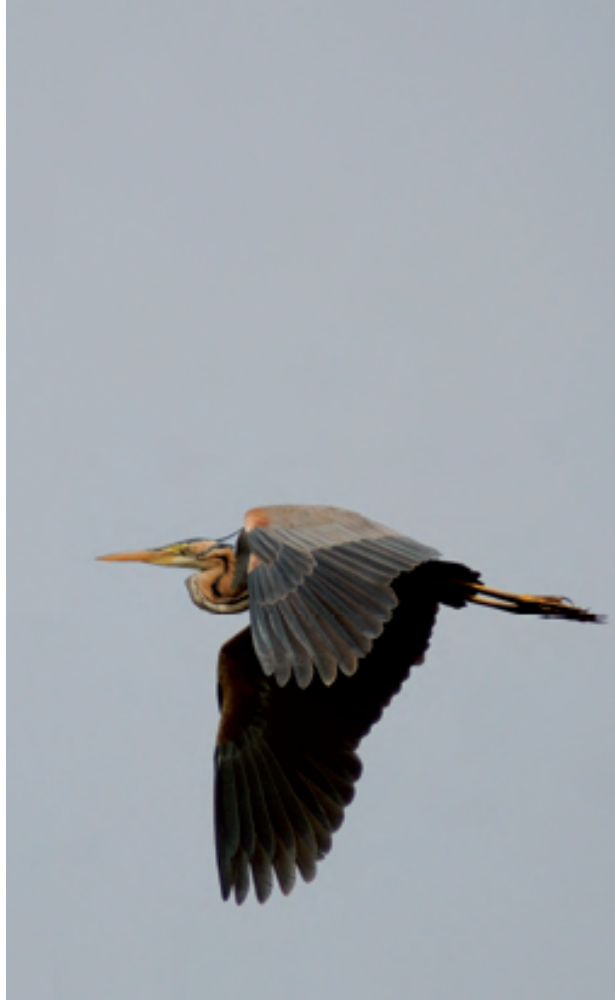


Take a quick look at some of the most remarkable, which are, unfortunately, in danger of extinction.

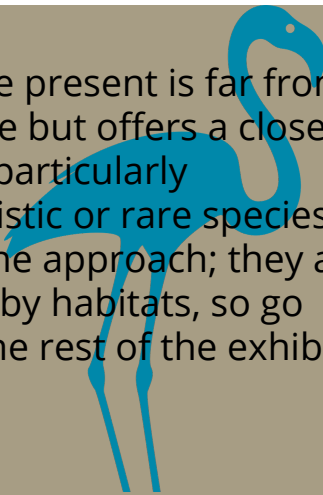


In bird's paradise

Peace, food, shelter... the lagoon offers birds a lot. As a result, they visit the site all year long. There are 280 sedentary or migratory species here, among which 89 are protected.



The list we present is far from exhaustive but offers a close-up on some particularly characteristic or rare species. To simplify the approach; they are classified by habitats, so go explore the rest of the exhibit!



The fortress of Salses

This fortress is the most important historical monument in the territory.

It is among the nearly one hundred monuments managed by the "Center des monuments nationaux", alongside Mont Saint-Michel, la Cité de Carcassonne, L'Arc de Triomphe, Les Eyzies and even the Notre-Dame Cathedral.



Open to visit year-round, the fortress also welcomes important contemporary art exhibitions.