

# Banc d'Arguin Mauritania



**Date of inscription on the World Heritage list:** 1989  
**Criteria:** significant ecological and biological processes (ix), significant natural habitat of biodiversity (x)  
**Property:** 1,200,000 ha  
**Location:** northern part of the Mauritanian coast, 145 km north of Nouakchott  
**Also classified as:** a WWF Global 200 Marine Eco-region.

Banc d'Arguin National Park, fringing the Atlantic coast, comprises sand-dunes, coastal swamps, small islands and shallow coastal waters. The contrast between the harsh desert environment and the biodiversity of the marine zone has resulted in a land and seascape of outstanding natural significance. A wide variety of migrating birds spend the winter there. Several species of sea turtle and dolphin, used traditionally by the Imraguen fishermen to attract shoals of fish, and a small population of one of the world's rarest animals, the monk seal, can also be found.



## Go4BioDiv Messenger Hacen El Hacen, 27

I was born in the desert in 1983 and grew up there until the age of seven. When I was a boy, my biggest dream was to convert the desert into green prairies. After my graduation, I got a job with the National Park of Banc d'Arguin in the wildlife management. Banc d'Arguin is a place where the desert and the yellow dunes fuse into the bluish of the Atlantic Ocean. My main interest is to understand how the Banc d'Arguin ecosystem works; especially the interaction between the birds and the tidal flats.



## Flora and Fauna

- About 190 plant species, most of them in the large offshore area of shallow water. Over 3,000 ha of mangroves (northernmost mangrove stands in the eastern Atlantic).
- Very large numbers of birds and fish can be found due to the high productivity of phytoplankton offshore. Banc d'Arguin has the world's largest concentration of wintering shorebirds: ca. 30% of the seven million shorebirds using the East Atlantic Flyway rest here, consisting of over 250 species. About 40,000 bird pairs breed in the Park.
- Mammals include: gazelle, foxes, sand cats, African wildcats, hyenas and the African striped weasel. Several species of dolphins and whales are regular visitors.

## Cultural Heritage and Local Population

- The customs of the ancient local people, the Imraguen, who still live in the park, are closely related to the natural environment. Some of these tribesmen still practice their inherited life styles and use very simple but efficient fishing methods.
- Although visitor facilities are being developed, there is very little tourism until now.



## Climate Change as Threat

Risks from climate change to biodiversity in Banc d'Arguin appear to be high:

- Sea-level rise threatens important coastal habitats. As a result of the flat terrain, the distances by which species would have to shift in order to follow changing climatic zones are relatively high.
- The capacity of plant species richness might decrease by as much as 50%; potentially resulting in the extinction of certain species from the site.
- The traditional subsistence fishing is hampered through industrial, above all foreign, fishing and the consequent diminishment of fish stocks.
- Increasing desertification leads to dramatic decrease in traditional nomadic camel and goat herding, which is permitted in the park.



## Sources

UNESCO <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/506/>  
WCMC fact sheet <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/sites/wh/pdf/Banc%20d%27Arguin.pdf>  
Climate Change: Loarie et al. 2009 / Sommer et al. 2010

## Photo Credits

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