



Waterbird Conservation for the Americas  
La Conservación de las Aves Acuáticas para las Américas  
Conservation des Oiseaux Aquatiques des Amériques

## Summary Report

### Waterbirds in French Guiana



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## Foreword

In 2004, Waterbird Conservation for the Americas initiated a project to gather and assess information in order to strategically advance conservation for critically threatened waterbird species and sites in Central America, the Caribbean and South America. French Guiana is a small French territory near Brazil and Suriname. A final report concerning waterbirds in French Guiana was written in April- July 2006. This report mentions species occurrence, conservation status, habitats and protected areas, threats, conservation projects, legislation in place for waterbirds and wetland conservation. This state of knowledge relevant to waterbirds has been realised with all available literature ,and recent information about distribution is based on fieldwork in the country. This work is the result of meetings and discussions with different ornithologists and waterbirds specialists present on the territory. 16 persons concerned with the topic were invited by email and some also by phone. These people were contacted and some gave very valuable information. This summary synthesizes all the informations available in the main report. For more edetails, we suggest you ask the GEPOG for a complete report.

### **Waterbird species occurring within the country.**

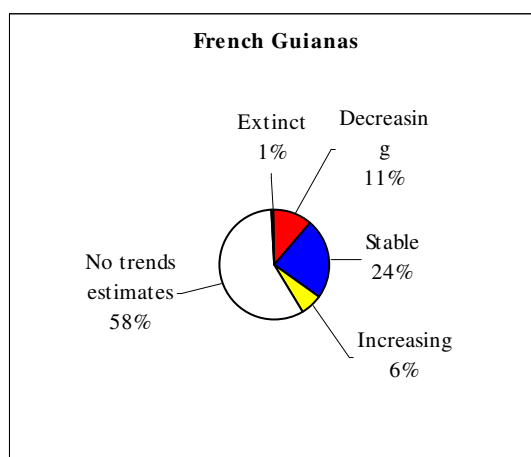
Waterbirds of French Guiana belong to 27 families; with most species belonging to Scolopacidae (28), Ardeidae (20), Rallidae (14), Anatidae (12) and Laridae (21). ??? 48 of the waterbird species breed here. French Guiana's waterbird avifauna is composed of 141 species. 4 sus-Species are considered. These can be categorized generally as seabirds, shorebirds and other freshwater species. Most of the seabirds breed far away from French Guiana. Migratory waterfowl and other freshwater species breed in North America and shorebirds breed in the far north: Siberia, Alaska, north and central Canada. 13 are wanderers, 36 are vagrants, 18 are migrants, (15 boreal & 3 austral migrants), 50 are wintering migrants and for 8 species the status is unknown. 20 are considered as intratropical migrants (for exemple: *Theristicus caudatus*, *Ajaia ajaja*, *Ciconia maguari*, *Jabiru mycteria* or *Mycteria americana*). Most numerous is *Calidris pusilla*, with a yearly peak of maximum 1million, more numerous than all other species together. Other important migrant species are *Calidris mauri* between 25,000-100,000 wintering birds and *Charadrius semipalmatus*, *Tringa melanoleuca*, *Tringa flavipes*, *Limnodromus griseus*, *Charadrius semipalmatus*, *Tringa melanoleuca*, *Tringa flavipes* with 10,000-25,000 wintering birds yearly. 24 birds species represent more than 1% of the biogeographical population in French Guiana. Some species represent more than 1% of breeding population in French guiana like *Dendrocygna autumnalis*, *Eudocimus ruber*, *Mesembrinibis cayennensis*, *Larus atricilla*, *Sterna nilotica aranea*, *Sterna sandvicensis eurygnatha* and *Sterna maxima*.

### **Information on distribution and habitat needs**

Most of the wetlands in French Guiana are situated between the coast and the savanna belt, which runs more or less parallel to the coastline. Along the coast there are vast mudflats and sandbanks, which are very important for the migrating shorebirds (Scolopacidae and Charadriidae), the egrets (Ardeidae), *Eudocimus ruber*, sterna (Laridae), *Anas bahamensis*, not to forget *Rynchops niger*. French Guiana coastline offers important stopover point and wintering place for 41 species. Hundreds of thousands of waterbirds pass through French Guiana during their southbound and northbound migrations using river mouths, beaches, swamps, mangroves and lagoons as stopover and wintering places. The coast consists mainly of mangroves. Behind and in between these mangroves we find many lagoons, which are also very important for the above mentioned birds and for the Anatidae. Five main rivers and a few smaller ones run from south to north. Here we find the Ardeidae (*Heliornis fulica*, *Eurypyga helias* and *Pilherodius pileatus*) and Threskiornithidae (*Mesembrinibis cayennensis*). Between the coastal lagoons and the savannas we find large marshes and swamps important for Rallidae. Marshes and swamps receive 30 species 23 of which are seabirds. Some small islands like the Connetable Islands concentrate a very important breeding seabird population.

### **Population estimates and trends (status)**

34% of bird species presents in French Guiana are considered as « rare ». The waterbird population appears various 16 species are known to have decreased in numbers during the last few decades. According to all the specialists, we may consider that all anatidae are declining cause due to overhunting. *Anhima cornuta* has not been observed and is most likely extinct in French Guiana.



We have listed species of special concern. 4 species and 3 families are concerned by “Conservation Priority”. 4 species and 4 families are concerned by “Research Priority”.

	Conservation Priority	Research Priority
<i>Anhima cornuta</i>	X	
All <i>Anatidae</i>	X	
All <i>Procellariidae</i>		X
<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>	X	
<i>Tigrisoma fasciatum</i>		X
<i>Agamia agami</i>		X
<i>Cochlearius cochlearius</i>		X
All <i>Rallidae</i>		X
All <i>Charadriidae</i> and <i>Scolopacidae</i>	X	X
<i>Sterna sandvicensis eurygnatha</i>	X	
<i>Sterna maxima</i>	X	
<i>Rynchops niger</i>		X

Species of special concern

#### Locations and descriptions of key sites used by aquatic species

40 locations are considered as key sites used by waterbirds. Four sites are more important than the others for waterbird conservation. They include breeding and wintering sites, migration corridors, and stopover??? areas and swamps.

- **Mana Marshes & swamps, coastline (UTM : 189 381/633 898)**

**Location** : Awala-Yalimapo et Mana.

**Surface** : 13 520 ha.

**Wetland Habitats** : Marine Dunes and Sandy beaches, Tropical Freshwater marshes, wet meadows, mudflats and sandbanks.

**Protected measures** : Ramsar Site (1993), Natural reserve.

**Importance for waterbirds conservation** : This site is the main breeding site of *Charadrius wilsonia*'s small population. Along the coast there are vast mudflats which are important for North American migratory birds (pointe Isère Organabo, Aztèques, Irakumpapi). Coastline marshes receive most of the breeding population of *Himantopus mexicanus* and the largest gathering of *Anatidae* in French Guiana (*Anas bahamensis*, *Dendrocygna automnalis*) and North American ducks like (*Anas discors*). Others species, with in smaller numbers are observed, with *Ajaia ajaja*, *Mycteria americana*, *Phoenicopterus ruber*, *Dendrocygna automnalis*, *Cairina moschata* and *Sakidiornis melanotos*.

**Threats on the site** : Water pollution by agricultural contamination might become a serious threat, as well as over fishing and hunting.

- **Kaw marshes. (TM : 378 998/ 518 651)**

**Location** : Régina, Roura.

**Surface** : 150 000 ha

**Wetlands habitats** : Swamp forests, tropical Freshwater marshes, wet meadows , peats, rivers and « criques », salt tropical marshes, mangroves, mudflats and sandbanks

**Protected measures** : Ramsar Site (1993), Natural reserve.

**Importance for waterbirds conservation** :

Kaw marshes is the most important site for wildlife, particularly for waterbirds. Kaw river mudflats and sandbanks are important for numerous migratory species and Ardeidae like *Ardea cocoi*, *Ardea alba*, *E. thula*, *E. tricolor*, *Agamia agami*, *Butorides striatus*, *Ixobrychus involucris*, *Ixobrychus exilis*...and *Eudocimus ruber*, *Ajaia ajaja*, *Mycteria americana* or the rare *Jaribu mycteria* and *Ciconia maguari*.

**Threats on the site** : Hunting, habitats destruction and water pollution by mercury from gold exploitation in the interior might become a serious threat.

- **Connétables islands (UTM : 394 403/ 532 700)**

**Location**: Cayenne.

**Surface** : 30 000 ha with marine area / 2,5 ha for the main island.

**Wetlands habitats** : Rocky coasts and cliffs, arbustive vegetation on rocks

**Protected habitats** : Ramsar Site (1993), Natural reserve.

**Importance for waterbirds conservation** : Connétable island are the most important site for the protection of seabirds in the Guianas and the South American east coast. They receive several thousand breeding pairs for six species like *Larus atricilla* (2500 pairs in 2005), *Sterna maxima* (1 300 pairs in 2005) and *Sterna eurygnatha*. French Guiana receives more than 20% of the population of those 3 species from the Caribbean area. *Sterna eurygnatha* is very threatened in its repartition area. 800 pairs breed on the Connétable Island. Concerning other breeding species, there are *Fregata magnificens*, with 600 pairs, more than 5 percents of the Caribbean population. *Sterna fuscata* breed there with 250 pairs and *Anous stolidus* with 100 pairs.

**Threats on the site** : Over fishing and sometimes the plundering of nests.

- **Béhague estuary (UTM : 414 229/482 350)**

**Location** : Régina.

**Surface** : 50 000 ha.

**Wetlands habitats** : Rock coasts, marine cliffs, swamp forests, tropical freshwater marshes, wet meadows , salt tropical marshes, mangroves, mudflats and sandbanks.

**Protected habitats** : none

**Importance for waterbirds conservation** :

Béhague estuary receives a rich avifauna. This site is the single breeding site for *Ajaia ajaja* in French Guiana. A small *Eudocimus ruber* colony has been observed (less than 100 pairs). Mudflats and sandbanks are important for numerous migratory species and numerous breeding Ardeidae like *Ardea cocoi*, *Agamia agami*, *Butorides striatus*, *Nyctanassa violacea* and *Nycticorax nycticorax*.

**Threats on the site** : Touristic activity, water pollution by mercury from gold extraction in the interior might become a serious threat, as well as overhunting.