Tram Chim National Park

Alternative site name(s)
Dong Thap Muoi, Tram Chim Tam Nong
Province(s)
Dong Thap
Area
7,588 ha
Coordinates
$10^0$40' - $10^0$47'N, $105^0$26' - $105^0$36'E
Agro-ecological zone
Mekong 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

Tram Chim was designated as a 'Sarus Crane Reserve' by Dong Thap Provincial People's Committee in 1986, for the protection of Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* (Buckton *et al.* 1999). Between May 1991 and December 1992, an investment plan for Tram Chim Nature Reserve was prepared by Ho Chi Minh City Forest Inventory and Planning Sub-institute (Sub-FIPI) (Anon. 1993a). On 2 February 1994, Decision No. 47/TTg of the Prime Minister and Official Letter 4991/KGVX decreed the establishment of a 7,500 ha nature reserve, called Tram Chim Tam Nong (MARD 1997, Pham Trong Thinh and Nguyen Chi Thanh 2000).

In September 1998, a revised investment plan for Tram Chim Nature Reserve was published by Ho Chi Minh City Sub-FIPI, which gave the total area of the nature reserve as 7,588 ha, comprising a strict protection area of 6,889 ha, a forest rehabilitation area of 653 ha and a administration and services area of 46 ha (Pham Trong Thinh 1998). Following the publication of this investment plan, the management category of Tram Chim was revised from nature reserve to national park, following Decision No. 253/QD-TTg of the Prime Minister, dated 29 December 1998. A management board has been established for Tram Chim National Park, and currently has 31 permanent members of staff and 41 contracted staff.

Tram Chim National Park is included on a list of Special-use Forests to be established by the year 2010, prepared by the FPD of MARD, with an area of 7,588 ha (FPD 2003); this list has not yet been approved by the government.

Topography and hydrology

Tram Chim National Park supports one of the last remnants of the Plain of Reeds wetland ecosystem, which previously covered some 700,000 ha of Dong Thap, Long An and Tien Giang provinces (Buckton *et al.* 1999). The national park is located 19 km to the east of the Mekong River, at an elevation of about 1 m. The topography of the national park is flat, and slopes slightly to the east. In the past, several natural streams and rivers flowed from west to east, distributing water from the Mekong River to the Plain of Reeds. Now these streams and rivers have been replaced by a system of canals, some of which flow through the national park (Pham Trong Thinh 1998).

Prior to canalization, the Plain of Reeds was seasonally flooded with standing water for continuous periods of up to seven months per year. Since canalization, floodwaters drain more rapidly, and the national park is flooded for less than six months per year. Water levels in the canals begin to rise in June, at the beginning of the rainy season. Between September and December, the national park is inundated to a

depth of 2 to 4 m, with a peak in October (Pham Trong Thinh 1998).

Since the mid-1980s, 53 km of dykes fitted with sluices have been constructed around the national park, with the aim of impounding floodwater for longer, and reducing the lowering of the water table during the dry season. The national park is fragmented by canals into five management zones; the water level of each can be managed separately (Pham Trong Thinh 1998).

Biodiversity values

The vegetation of Tram Chim National Park comprises a mixture of seasonally inundated grassland, regenerating *Melaleuca* forest and open swamp. *Melaleuca* is distributed throughout the national park, both in plantations and in scattered patches in areas of grassland or open swamp. There are five widespread grassland communities at Tram Chim, of which the community dominated by *Eleocharis dulcis* and wild rice *Oryza rufipogon* is of the highest conservation significance. Tram Chim is one of the few places in the Plain of Reeds where this community is likely to survive to any extent, and, therefore, one of the most important sites for the conservation of wild rice in Vietnam. The other grassland communities are dominated by *Eleocharis ochrostachys*, *Panicum repens*, *Ischaemum rugosum* and *Vossia cuspidata*. Another vegetation type found at Tram Chim is lotus swamp, which is dominated by lotus *Nelumbo nucifera*, along with *Nymphaea nouchali*, *N. pubescens* and *N. tetragona* (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

The site supports significant numbers of waterbirds, particularly during the winter months. Of particular importance is the non-breeding population of the eastern subspecies of Sarus Crane *Grus antigone sharpii*, which regularly spends the dry season at the national park. Between 1989 and 1999, the maximum dry-season count of Sarus Cranes at Tram Chim ranged from 187 to 814 individuals, with a mean of 496 (BirdLife International 2001). In 2001, however, crane numbers had dropped to around 50, while there had been a proportional increase in the number of birds at Kien Luong proposed nature reserve to the south-west. It is hypothesised that the decrease in the Sarus Crane population at Tram Chim occurred not as a result of mortality but because birds that normally spent the dry season at Tram Chim spent the dry seasons of 2001 and 2002 at Kien Luong.

In addition to Sarus Crane, the globally endangered Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* has also been recorded at Tram Chim National Park. The status of this secretive grassland specialist at Tram Chim is not fully known but it is likely that birds vacate the area during periods of substantial inundation in the late wet season. Local people believe that the species breeds at the site, and claim to have found both eggs and young of the species but this has yet to be confirmed. A number of other globally threatened and near-threatened bird species regularly occur at Tram Chim, including Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* and Asian Golden Weaver *Ploceus hypoxanthus* (Tordoff 2002). Other wetland bird species of note recorded at Tram Chim include Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*, Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* and Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* (Buckton *et al.* 1999). Because of its importance for globally threatened and congregatory bird species, Tram Chim qualifies as an Important Bird Area (Tordoff 2002).

Conservation issues

Tram Chim now has national park status, which confers a relatively high degree of protection, yet several threats remain. The frequent encroachment of local people into the national park to hunt and collect firewood is a conservation issue. Also, because the site is surrounded by rice cultivation, land-use activities outside the site can have a substantial impact on the integrity of the wetland ecosystem of the national park. Examples of such impacts are pollutant discharge and alteration of natural water levels (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

In 2000, the national park management board began constructing six canals inside the national park, the construction of which could have fragmented the natural habitat and altered the water regime, leading to changes in habitat. However, construction of the canals was halted after only two were completed.

The construction of canals is not, perhaps, the major threat to the Sarus Crane population at Tram Chim. The most important factor in maintaining suitable habitat for this species is appropriate

management of the water level at the site. In 2000, a partial draw-down was carried out, and, in 2001, a full draw-down took place, as a result of which there is a lot of evidence of natural vegetation recovery (J. Barzen *in litt.* 2001). It is hoped that such appropriate water-level management will result in an increase in the crane population at Tram Chim.

Tram Chim meets the criteria for designation as a site of international importance for wetland conservation under the Ramsar Convention. Indeed, in 2000, an information sheet on Tram Chim National Park has been compiled by Ho Chi Minh City Sub-FIPI as a first step to designating the site as a Ramsar Site (Pham Trong Thinh and Nguyen Chi Thanh 2000).

Other documented values

Tram Chim National Park stores water during times of flood and releases it only slowly as floodwaters recede. In so-doing, the site helps to mitigate the negative effects of flooding on surrounding agricultural lands and agricultural communities (Pham Trong Thinh and Nguyen Chi Thanh 2000). Tram Chim National Park is one of the best developed and most well known sites for ecotourism in the Mekong Delta. The national park already has basic tourist facilities, and previously received many visitors. However, the decline in numbers of Sarus Crane, the major attraction, has resulted in a decrease in the number of visitors to the national park (Vietnam News 2003b).

Related projects

The International Crane Foundation (ICF) have been active at Tram Chim since 1988. During this time, ICF have developed a management plan for the site, in collaboration with the national park management board, which they are currently supporting the implementation of.

Tram Chim is one of the demonstration sites of the *Mekong River Basin Wetland Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme, Phase I.* This programme is being implemented by IUCN, the Mekong River Commission and UNDP, with funding from UNDP/GEF and SIDA. The goal of this programme is to assist countries in the Lower Mekong sub-region to develop new approaches to integrating the protection and sustainable use of wetland biodiversity with economic development. At Tram Chim proposed nature reserve, demonstration activities will include ecotourism development.

The national 661 Programme is currently funding forestry activities at the site.

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

The site is eligible for VCF support because it meets criteria A, B and C.

Criterion	Eligibility
A_I	LMF2 - Northwestern Mekong Delta Wetlands
A_{II}	VN006 - Tram Chim
B_I	Decision No. 253/TTg, dated 29/12/98
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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