

## Ramsar Information Sheet

**1. Date this sheet was completed:**

19 April 1998

**2. Country:**

Costa Rica

**3. Name of wetlands**

National Park "Isla del Coco" (Coconut Island)

**4. Geographical coordinates:**

5 32'57" North and 86 59'17" West

**5. Altitude :**

from sea level to approx. 636 m

**6. Area :**

2,400 ha land and 97,232 ha water. Total of 99.623 ha.

**7. Overview**

Coconut island was discovered in 1526 and during the XVII and XVIII century it was the shelter of pirates and privateers. According to a story, valuable treasures of gold and silver were hidden on the island.

The island is extremely humid, covered with an evergreen forest. Cloudy in the higher located areas. The ecosystem shows abundant vegetation and formation of corals. It is a good example of an insular ecosystem. It is considered as one of the four most endemic sites of the country (16%). Coconut island is an important site for the reproduction of certain species.

**8. Wetland type:**

Coastal zone : A, C, D, Y

Continental : M, N, Tp

**9. Ramsar criteria:**

The most significant criteria is the maritime zone and the existence of many different species of corals and fish. Some of the most extensive coral reefs rich in species native to the Oriental Pacific are found here. It is a meeting point of pelagic animals (from open waters) and animals from the coral reefs (coastal waters). Furthermore, it is the first area of the American Pacific which is reached by the North Equatorial cross current. The current brings water and organisms from the other side of the Pacific to the American coasts (after having travelled 5000 km; it is one of the largest and deepest waters of the planet). The island serves as the first settling area for larvae, which travel across the Pacific.

Most fish can be found in the area where there are coral reefs or corallines and small islands. Depending on the area, 1500-24000 individuals per km<sup>2</sup> can be seen. However, the total area for fish is limited. The whole area covers no more than 10-12 km<sup>2</sup>, which is not more than half of the island's surface.

**10. Map :**

Attached

**11. Name and address of compiler:**

Fernando Quirós Brenes  
San José, Costa Rica, Barrio Francisco Peralta, Calle 25 Avenidas 8-10.  
Apdo 11384-1000 San José, Costa Rica  
e-mail: iscoco@sol.racsa.co.cr  
Telephone: 257-09-22 Fax: 256-03-65

**12. Justification of criteria selected under point 9:**

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**13. General location:**

The Isla del Coco is located in the Pacific approx. 535 km South West of Puntarenas (capital of the Province of Puntarenas). Isla del Coco is a district of the central canton of the Province of Puntarenas, situated between 87°01'47" West and 87°05'46" North.

**14. Physical features**

Volcanic formation with an irregular topography. The highest point is at 634 m. The coast is extremely steep with several waterfalls. The coastline is irregular. It is the only part of the Cocos Tectonic Plate which protrudes from the submarine volcanic chain which stretches from the Galapagos islands until the mesoamerican fossa in the South Eastern part of Costa Rica. Precipitation lies around 7000 mm/year and temperatures fluctuates between 24° and 26°C.

**15. Hydrological values:**

The rivers of the island have deep beds, created by natural erosion. Steep slopes form waterfalls.

**16. Ecological features:**

The vegetation is not very dense. The area can be divided in two zones: the swampy coastal zone and the mountainous zone. It is important to note that coconut island is the only island in the Oriental Pacific which has a "cloudy forest".

**17. Flora:**

Several endemic species. In the evergreen forest, 175 species of vascular plants were identified (of which 68 are ferns and related species). A fossil of scientific interest *Psilotum hudum* L was identified. The most common plants are: *Sacoglottis holdridgei*, *Ocotea ira*, *Clusia rosea*, *Euterpe precatoria*, *Cecropia pittieri*, *Hypolitem amplum* and various other fern species. Also, two endemic orchid species were identified. 16% of the flora is endemic.

**18. Fauna**

Not much wildlife on Isla del Coco, which is normal for a small island, far away from the continent. 5 endemic species: *Norops townsendi*, *sphaerodactylus pacificus*, *Coccyzus ferrugineus*, *Nezotriccus ridgwayi* and *Pinarolaxias inornata*. Furthermore, a large number of waterbirds exist on the island, some of which nest on the island or on the small islands surrounding it. Among them we find: *Gygis alba* and *Fragata minor*. 97 species of birds, 3 species of spiders, 57 crustaceans, 518 species of molluscs and 450 insects.

The coralreefs wich surround the island include 18 species of corals, among which *Porites lobata* is the most frequent. In the waters live more than 300 species of fish :

*Sphyrna lewini*, *Triacnodon abesus* and *Rhincodon typus*. Especially the endemic species are well represented on the island.

#### **19. Social and cultural values**

The island's history is rich in legends about pirates and hidden treasures. Coffee plants and avocado trees were brought here by the first colonists. In Pinta Presidio, remainders of fired clay can be found, which show that the island once possessed a prison.

Tourists visit the island. The main activity is diving. The island is also popular for holidays and for fishermen as a spot to supply them with water.

#### **20. Ownership**

The whole island belongs to the Costarican State.

#### **21. Current use**

Devoted to conservation purposes.

#### **22. Factors adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land use and development projects**

Until now, no damage was caused to the island by tourists. Before numbers of tourists increase, preventive measures should be taken. Fishing resources seem to be good. The coral reefs have recuperated from the 1982-1983 el Niño. Also the process of bioerosion is of significant importance. Socially and economically, the island suffers from tourism and fishing. Regarding fishing, there is no precise information which can assess the real impact. Regarding tourism, number of tourists on land do not increase, hunting of endemic species is non existent and deforestation is taken care of. On the other hand, numbers of divers increase (tour operators and sports divers). From 1985 to 1993, an increase of 260% was noted. This number will probably increase in the coming years.

#### **23. Conservation measures taken**

The whole island, and the 10 km surrounding it, are protected as National Park (since 1978). Any kind of commercial activity, removal or introduction of species, contamination or change of the environment is prohibited.

#### **24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented**

Different Management and Action Plans for the island exist and are being implemented.

#### **25. Current research facilities**

Coordination of specific investigations on molluscs, insects, plants and birds. Infrastructure for research facilities is lacking. At this moment, research facilities of other institutions are used.

#### **26. Current conservation education**

At this moment, no educational programme exists.

#### **27. Current recreation and tourism**

The main tourist attraction on the island is recreational diving. The island does not possess any tourist facilities. All visitors must carry out their activities on board the vessel with which they travel.

On the island, paths exist, but are rarely used. Tourists mainly come from Europe and the US. Per year, around 2000 people visit the area (mainly from May - December).

## **28. Jurisdiction**

The State has jurisdiction and carries it out through the Ministry of Environment and Energy.

## **29. Management Authority**

“Sistema Nacional de Areas de Conservación” through the “Area de conservación Marina del Coco” Ministry of Environment and Energy.

## **30. References**

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