

Dat Mui Nature Reserve

Alternative site name(s)

Ca Mau, Duoc Ca Mau, Tam Giang

Province(s)

Ca Mau

Status

Decreed

Management board established

Yes

Latitude

8°34' - 8°41'N

Longitude

104°41' - 104°48'E

Bio-unit

05a - Mekong Delta



Conservation status

Dat Mui Nature Reserve is situated in Ngoc Hien district, Ca Mau province. When the site was established, Ca Mau province, together with Bac Lieu province, was part of Minh Hai province. The former Minh Hai Provincial People's Committee established Dat Mui Nature Reserve in 1983, encompassing a total area of 4,388 ha. Prior to this, during the French colonial period, the area had been designated as Tam Giang Ornamental Forest.

Under the name Ca Mau Nature Reserve, the site was included on Decision No 194/CT of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, dated 9 August 1986, with an area of a 4,000 ha (MARD 1997). In 1990, an investment plan was prepared by Ho Chi Minh City Sub-FIPI, which proposed establishing a 4,461 ha nature reserve with the name Dat Mui (Anon. 1990). This investment plan was approved by the former Ministry of Forestry in 1992 (FPD 1998). According to Buckton *et al.* (1999), the site currently managed by the provincial FPD covers 7,239 ha, of which 4,388 ha is considered Special-use Forest by the site staff. Of the Special-use Forest, only 1,717 ha of forest is zoned as strict protection area.

Dat Mui Nature Reserve is included on the 2010 list, with an area of 4,461 ha (FPD 1998). Also, Dat

Mui, together with the contiguous Bai Boi area, is included on a list of proposed protected areas currently being prepared by FPD and FIPI, with a total area of 10,000 ha (FPD and FIPI in prep.).

Topography and hydrology

Dat Mui Nature Reserve is situated at the southernmost tip of Vietnam. The site was originally covered in natural mangrove forest dominated by *Rhizophora apiculata* but the vast majority was destroyed during the Second Indochina War and, later, by conversion to aquacultural ponds and agricultural land. Most of the aquacultural ponds have been abandoned, and now support extensive areas of re-colonising mangrove forest. There are extensive mudflats, which are also being colonised naturally by mangrove. The site is continually growing due to accretion rates along the coastline of up to 50 m per year in places (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Biodiversity value

To the north, Dat Mui Nature Reserve is contiguous with Bai Boi Coastal Protection Forest, and, together, these two areas comprise an important area of intertidal mudflats and mangrove forest for migratory waterbirds. The coastal mangrove forest is dominated by *Avicennia alba*, *A. officinalis*, *A. marina*,

Rhizophora apiculata and *Kandelia candel*. Also, *Bruguiera* sp. and *Sonneratia* sp. occur sporadically (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Some small areas of old growth *Rhizophora apiculata* mangrove remain at Dat Mui. This vegetation type probably covered much of the area in the past. Evidence of over-exploitation is abundant, with many old logged bases of large *Rhizophora apiculata* trees present. There are still some big trees over 10 years old, though generally the habitat is degraded. Signs of mangrove forest regeneration, however, have been observed at Dat Mui. *Rhizophora apiculata* plantations of different ages are also extensive at Dat Mui. The stocking density of these plantations varies greatly from one to six trees per square metre (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Dat Mui Nature Reserve is considered to be an important site for a number of migratory waterbirds. Globally threatened and near-threatened migratory waterbird species recorded at Dat Mui include Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* and Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*. Large concentrations of Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* and Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* have also been recorded. The habitats of particular importance for migratory waterbirds at Dat Mui include exposed mud, and remnant and regenerating mangrove forest (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Conservation issues

The mangrove forests of Dat Mui have been severely degraded in the last 10 years, largely as a result of illegal encroachment and conversion to aquacultural ponds. Considerable effort has been made to restore the site and many illegal settlers have been evicted. However, there are still substantial numbers of people living in or around the site and encroachment into even the strictly protected area frequently occurs. Mangrove is still exploited where it remains, and all areas of mature mangrove forest at this site are severely degraded (Buckton *et al.* 1999).

Buckton *et al.* (1999) recommend that Dat Mui, together with Bai Boi, should be designated as a site of international importance under the Ramsar

Convention. Furthermore, these authors recommend that no mangrove planting should be carried out in areas of accreting mudflats, because this is an important habitat for migratory waterbirds that would otherwise become naturally recolonised by mangrove at rates that are unlikely to compromise the importance of the habitat.

Other documented values

When the mangroves were still in good condition, many domestic tourists visited the area, as well as foreign tourists and scientists. Present visitor use of the site is virtually nil. However, once mangrove forest cover has been restored and wildlife populations have increased, the site will have great potential for nature recreation, conservation education and scientific research. Another attraction to visitors is the fact that Dat Mui is the southernmost tip of mainland Vietnam

Related projects

Prior to 1999, the national 327 Programme was the main source of investment funding for the activities of Dat Mui Nature Reserve management board. Since, 1999, the 327 Programme has been replaced by the 661 Programme as the most important source of investment funding for the nature reserve.

A coastal wetland development and protection project, funded by the World Bank and implemented by MARD, is being conducted in four provinces in the Mekong Delta, including Ca Mau. Dat Mui Nature Reserve may be included in this project, with an emphasis on coastal mangrove protection. Any of the activities of this development project have the potential to disturb the natural environment with negative repercussions on the biodiversity value of the site. Safeguards need to be incorporated into this project to mitigate this threat.

Literature sources

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