



Abstracts of World Heritage

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/798/>

The Sundarbans Reserve Forest (SRF), located in the south-west of Bangladesh between the river Baleswar in the East and the Harinbanga in the West, adjoining to the Bay of Bengal, is the largest contiguous mangrove forest in the world. Lying between latitude 21° 27' 30" and 22° 30' 00" North and longitude 89° 02' 00" and 90° 00' 00" East and with a total area of 10,000 km², 60% of the property lies in Bangladesh and the rest in India. The land area, including exposed sandbars, occupies 414,259 ha (70%) with water bodies covering 187,413 ha (30%).

The Sundarbans provides a significant example of on-going ecological processes as it represents the process of delta formation and the subsequent colonization of the newly formed deltaic islands and associated mangrove communities. These processes include monsoon rains, flooding, delta formation, tidal influence and plant colonization. As part of the world's largest delta, formed from sediments deposited by three great rivers; the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna, and covering the Bengal Basin, the land has been moulded by tidal action, resulting in a distinctive physiology.

Its exceptional biodiversity is expressed in a wide range of flora; 334 plant species belonging to 245 genera and 75 families, 165 algae and 13 orchid species. It is also rich in fauna with 693 species of wildlife which includes; 49 mammals, 59 reptiles, 8 amphibians, 210 white fishes, 24 shrimps, 14 crabs and 43 mollusks species. The varied and colourful bird-life found along the waterways of the property is one of its greatest attractions, including 315 species of waterfowl, raptors and forest birds including nine species of kingfisher and the magnificent white-bellied sea eagle.

Natural calamities such as cyclones, have always posed threats on the values of the property and along with saline water intrusion and siltation, remain potential threats to the attributes. Cyclones and tidal waves cause some damage to the forest along the sea-land interface and have previously caused occasional considerable mortality among some species of fauna such as the spotted deer.

Over exploitation of both timber resources and fauna, illegal hunting and trapping, and agricultural encroachment also pose serious threats to the values of the property and its overall integrity.

The Sundarbans provides sustainable livelihoods for millions of people in the vicinity of the site and acts as a shelter belt to protect the people from storms, cyclones, tidal surges, sea water seepage and intrusion. The area provides livelihood in certain seasons for large numbers of people living in small villages surrounding the property, working variously as wood-cutters, fisherman, honey gatherers, leaves and grass gatherers.

Tourism numbers remain relatively low due to the difficult access, arranging transport and a lack of facilities including suitable accommodation. While the legal protection afforded the property prohibit a number of activities within the boundaries illegal hunting, timber extraction and agricultural encroachment pose potential threats to the values of the property. Storms, cyclones and tidal surges up to 7.5 m high, while features of the areas, also pose a potential threat with possible increased frequency as a result of climate change.