
Location



Introduction

French Guiana is an overseas territory of France, located on the northern tip of South America. It is bordered by Brazil to the east and south, Suriname to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the northeast. The large territory of 84,000km² is sparsely inhabited, with approximately half its residents living in the capital Cayenne (and most of the population living along the narrow coastal strip). The coastline is 380km long, with several small islands found off the coast. Around 99% of French Guiana's landmass is covered by rainforest.

French Guiana has a tropical climate. Summer runs from July to December and the rainy season from January to June, broken by a short "march summer", which is dry.

Fully integrated into the French Republic, French Guiana is part of the European Union, however its infrastructure is less well developed than in mainland France. It is divided into 22 communes, 11 of which are on the coast

Regional Seas and Biogeography

Wider Caribbean region
North Brazil Shelf LME

Habitats

The Guianese coastline is unique in that it is dynamic, with highly mobile large mud banks transiting along the coast from East to West with the influence of the Amazon river, that regularly remodel the coastal environment. The coastal fringe is essentially made up of wetlands including marshes, swamps, mangroves and mudflats.

- Coral reefs – large coral and sponge reefs are found offshore, part of the Amazon reef system which stretches into Brazilian waters.
- Mangroves are found throughout approximately 80% of the coastline,
- Saltmarsh can be found in many areas, particularly around La Réserve Naturelle de l'Amara in the northwest and the Marais de Kaw reserve in the south.
- Seagrasses are found on the northeast coast of both São Tomé and Príncipe islands, being more common in the former.

Due to the coastal mud bank movement, it is difficult to predict where waterbirds are likely to be found year on year, however approximately one-third of the 700 avian species found in French Guiana inhabit coastal wetlands. 80% of the coast is mudflats, covered mostly with mangroves. Given the dynamic coastal environment, only a very small proportion of the coast of French Guiana is accessible without a boat.

Biodiversity Hotspots

→ National Parks

La Réserve Naturelle de l'île du Grand Connétable (also an IBA), 18 km off the coast of the Approuague estuary near the Brazilian border includes a huge marine area and two small islands: Grand Connétable and Petit Connétable. Grand Connétable Island is the only bird breeding site between the Amazon and Orinoco rivers (2000km of coastline) and the only island off French Guiana with marine birds due to its steep cliffs. Several thousands of birds breed there between April and September. These include magnificent frigate bird (*Fregata magnificens*, its only breeding location), brown noddy (*Anous stolidus*), laughing gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) and three species of tern – Cabot's (*Thalasseus sandvicensis/eurygnathus*, more than 8,000 pairs), royal (*Thalasseus maxima*, their largest colony in the Caribbean) and sooty (*Onychoprion fuscatus*). Many species of waders have been recorded at Petit Connétable (sandpipers, sandpipers, ruddy turnstones, etc.).

La Réserve Naturelle d'Amara (Basse-Mana) is a regional natural park and IBA, on the north-western coast, close to the border with Suriname (Marone river). It includes a plain of sandy barrier beaches, freshwater and

brackish swamps, mudflats, mangrove and swamp forests. It provides important habitat for nesting turtles, wintering grounds for many wader species and feeding, staging, nesting and breeding areas for waterbirds (being a major stopover for migratory birds). Green ibis (*Mesembrinibis cayennensis*) and scarlet ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*) are resident in the area, and sandwich terns (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) nest there. More than 100,000 individual birds have been observed here, and the area is also known for jaguars and many species of caiman (see under mammals). Most land is owned by the state but the Kalinas Amerindian people have right of usage.

→ RAMSAR Sites

L'Estuaire du fleuve Sinnamary is a wetland complex along the shores of the Sinnamary river towards the western part of the coast, with intertidal mudflats, sand flats, mangroves, freshwater swamps and seasonally flooded areas towards the Sinnamary river delta. The site is important habitat for the West-Indian manatee (VU), green turtles (EN) nest and forage here and it hosts large populations of the semipalmated sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) and yellow-billed tern (*Sternula superciliaris*).

Le Marais de Kaw (also an IBA) is a vast grassland and swamp area with mudflats, mangroves and swamps with small tidal rivers and ponds. It is located in the northeast of the country and extends either side of the Approuage, with the eastern part extending from Pointe Béhague to the Oyapock River which forms the border with Brazil. Certain areas are restricted for access (except for scientific studies).

Kaw is very rich in birdlife and hosts many species of feeding, breeding, and wintering waterbirds. The yellow-billed tern (*Sternula superciliaris*) breeds in the area, Scarlet ibises (*Eudocimus ruber*) are found in the mangroves and American spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*) nest at Pointe Béhague (also congregating here year round). Ponds in the central zone bring in many waterbirds, including a very large nesting colony of Agami herons (*Agamia agami*), plus other heron and egret species. Hoatzins (*Opisthocomus hoazin*) – found in swamps. Manatees, giant otter and many reptiles are found in the Kaw region (see under species lists below).

→ IBAs

A marine IBA site extends around bird colonies in the Connétable reserve, important for breeding populations of Least tern (*Sternula antillarum*) and populations of Magnificent frigatebird, royal tern and Cabot's tern numbering in their thousands.

A marine IBA site also extends seawards of breeding colonies in the Amana marine reserve, known for breeding populations of sandwich tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*).

The **Littoral** IBA is the coastal strip averaging 10km wide and stretching for 320km, where almost all the country's population lives. It is important for wintering and migrating waders, with open water areas, mudflats, mangroves, sandy and rocky beaches, rivers/estuaries and marshes. Tens of thousands of herons roost here throughout the year, including several species of egret and scarlet ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*).

→ IMMAs

The Guianas to Amazon Outflow IMMA Extends from central Guianas to Maranhão, Brazil. The outflow of the Amazon brings a very high productivity to the area, which is a feeding area for a varied community of marine mammals. Also encompassing the Amazon Reef System, which extends into Brazil, this IMMA is important habitat for the Guiana dolphin (*Sotalia guianensis*) and the Amazon River dolphin (EN), as well as the Amazonian manatee (VU) and the West Indian manatee (VU).

At risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

→ At risk birds

French Guiana is located on the West-Atlantic flyway and is a very important site for migrating north american waterbirds. The distribution of waders follows that of the shifting mudflats along the coast. Common waterbird species include several ducks, teal and pintail, with nesting terns, magnificent frigatebirds, gulls and brown noddies. Waders are dominated by semi-palmated sandpiper, along with knots, stilts, ibis, spoonbill and skimmer, among others. Many of these species are protected under French Guyanese law, meaning restrictions on capturing or handling them.

→ At risk reptiles

Green sea turtle (EN), olive ridley (VU), and leatherback turtles (VU) are known to nest in French Guiana, with hawksbill turtles (CR) also observed and nesting less frequently. Green turtles nest between February and May, leatherbacks from April to August and Olive ridleys from May to September.

Important areas for turtle nesting are the beaches of Awala-Yalimapo in the west close to the Suriname border and the Point-Isère/Oranahbo coast near Kourou and Cayenne. Olive ridley tends to nest more in the east of the country, particularly around Cayenne. Green turtles forage on seagrass around Iles de remire (Cayenne) and also forage off Ile Connétable.

Consumption of marine turtle eggs has diminished but is still within the traditional rights of the Kalinas in the Amana natural reserve.

The marshes of the Kaw region are home to several aquatic reptiles including yellow-spotted river turtle (VU), black caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*), matamata turtle (*Chelus fimbriatus*) and northern caiman lizard (*Dracaena guianensis*).

→ At risk mammals

Aquatic mammal species found in French Guiana include Amazon river dolphin (EN), West Indian Manatee (VU), Amazonian manatee (VU) and Guiana dolphin (*Sotalia guianensis*). Guiana dolphins are seen year-round and use estuaries and bays for feeding, mating, resting, calving and nursing calves.

Other species of cetacean frequently seen, and presumed to be breeding and present year round, include bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), Atlantic spotted dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*), spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*), melon-headed whale (*Peponocephala electra*) and pantropical spotted dolphin (*Stenella attenuata*). Long-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) are also often observed, as well as humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) and sperm whales (VU).

Giant otters (EN) are found in French Guiana's coastal and riverine/aquatic areas, such as in the Kaw marshes. They breed during the dry season.

A number of terrestrial species are also found in coastal and wetland areas, including Brazilian tapir (VU) and, in the mangroves of the Amana reserve the crab-eating raccoon (*Procyon cancrivorus*). Jaguar (*Panthera onca*) also frequents beaches in the Amana area to predate on sea turtles. Several caiman species are also known in this area including dwarf caimans (*Paleosuchus palpebrosus*) and spectacled caimans (*Caiman crocodilus*).

Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

There have been no major spills in French Guiana's waters. Drilling campaigns in the past 10-20 years have failed to discover significant oil reserves offshore of the coast, however the northeasterly currents in the area mean that a significant risk from oil spills originating from Brazil could impact French Guiana's coastline.

Note – for the section below oil spill/HNS response, French Guiana is party to the same conventions as France.

International and Regional Treaties and Agreements

→ Oil spill and HNS Response

→ Marine Biodiversity Protection

- Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region

Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response

→ National Contingency Plan?

French Guiana is covered under France's Plan POLMAR, or system for marine pollution (oil spills). The POLMAR system is activated in the event of accidental marine pollution at sea or in an estuary, with two components: maritime and land-based. The maritime component (Polmar-Mer) is managed by the préfet maritime (maritime prefect) and national maritime authorities, including naval assets. The land-based component (Polmar-Terre) is coordinated by the préfet de département (regional prefect) with civil and local emergency units. In French Guiana, these are combined into a local version often referred to as "Plan Polmar Guyane", adapted to its waters, coastlines, ports, and environmental sensitivities. The Prefect — representing both civil and maritime authority — activates and oversees the plan in the event of an oil spill.

→ Role of Competent National Authorities

The prefect exercises their authority via the Direction Générale des Territoires et de la Mer (DGTM Guyane),

who will support coordination and mobilisation of oil spill response operations. Naval authorities in Martinique (French Antilles) would be called on in the event of a serious incident, as well as the Centre de documentation, de recherche et d'expérimentation sur les pollutions accidentelles des eaux (CEDRE), may also be called in to assist during a significant marine pollution event.

Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response

→ **Formal guidelines?**

An oiled wildlife response plan is currently being developed for French Guiana by the association Eden-I (see under impact assessment below) and the DGTM. This is part of an update to the French Guiana POLMAR plan, to be integrated into the POLMAR plan and is planned for adoption during 2026.

It is likely that the Office Français de la Biodiversité en Guyane would get involved in a wildlife response, having responsibility for biodiversity and protected area management in the Mana nature reserve.

→ **Response objectives and strategy**

No reference.

→ **Euthanasia or rehabilitation?**

With appropriate resources in place, it is likely that a predefined strategy, such as that used in France, would be employed in French Guiana, involving both coordinated attempts to rehabilitate and euthanasia as appropriate.

→ **Impact assessment**

Impact assessment would follow that described within the Impact Assessment Annex to the French POLMAR contingency plan.

EDEN-i carries out monitoring of Guiana dolphins and sea turtles, so would likely get involved in impact assessment if relating to strandings or casualties of these species, with WWF Guianas also conducting turtle nesting monitoring studies. The Groupe d'Etude et de protection des oiseaux en Guyane (GEPOG) would likely get involved in impact assessment activities for birds.

The Réseau des Echouages en Guyane (REG) is a stranding network for marine mammals and sea turtles coordinated by the Association Eden-I and also involving (among others) the Connétable and Amana nature reserves, le Réseau Tortues Marines Guyane (sea turtle network), WWF, the Association Kwata, the Office National de la Chasse et de la Faune Sauvage (ONCFS), SOS Faune Sauvage and the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). The Amana Reserve and the Kwata association are responsible for receiving reports of marine mammal and sea turtle strandings. Samples are sent to the CNRS' PELAGIS observatory in France for analysis.

→ **Notification and early response**

Notification would be based on the French POLMAR-mer plan, with the prefect initiating response operations in all cases.

Stranded marine mammals or turtles can be reported to the REG or to the emergency number of the CROSS service (Centre régional opérationnel de surveillance et de sauvetage Antilles-Guyane).

→ **Wildlife responders**

The REG is well organised to deal with mammal and sea turtle strandings. Such a network does not exist for birds in French Guiana, but there are some small wildlife rescue/rehabilitation organisations could potentially assist (see under permanent facilities). It is likely that WWF Guianas and the Association KWATA would support a wildlife response.

Around the Cayenne area there are some veterinarians who could potentially assist in a response, as well as a few individuals in the western part of the country.

→ **Cooperation between stakeholders**

A regional Action Plan for leatherback turtles was initiated in 2019 by WWF Guianas, since this species has been declining in nesting abundance in the Guianas in recent years. The plan focuses on nesting beaches and wider conservation actions.

→ **Permanent facilities**

There are no permanent dedicated facilities dealing with marine wildlife species in French Guiana. The Parc Zoologique de Guyane, part of the association SOS Faune Sauvage and located just west of Cayenne, houses a small centre called the KA'ACIQUE Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, which has some capacity for wildlife

rehabilitation including pools.
Two other small centres exist – Jungle Vet and ONCA, which carry out wildlife rehabilitation, but primarily with terrestrial (not marine) species.

→ **Current processes**
No reference.

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Appendix 1

→ At risk birds

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Leach's Storm-petrel / *Hydrobates leucorhous* / VU / rare migrant (boreal winter) /
Grey Plover / *Pluvialis squatarola* / VU / Migratory (boreal winter) /
Hudsonian Godwit / *Limosa haemastica* / VU / Migratory (boreal winter) /
White-rumped Sandpiper / *Calidris fuscicollis* / VU / Migratory (boreal winter) /
Short-billed Dowitcher / *Limnodromus griseus* / VU / Migratory (boreal winter) /
Lesser Yellowlegs / *Tringa flavipes* / VU / Migratory (boreal winter) /

→ At risk reptiles

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Green turtle / *Chelonia mydas* / EN / Resident/migratory / Nesting february to may
Leatherback turtle / *Dermochelys coriacea* / VU / Resident/migratory / Nesting april to august
Olive ridley turtle / *Lepidochelys olivacea* / VU / Resident/migratory / Nesting may to september
Hawksbill turtle / *Eretmochelys imbricata* / CR / Resident/migratory /
Yellow-spotted river turtle / *Podocnemis cayennensis* / VU / Resident /

→ At risk mammals

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Amazon river dolphin / *Inia geoffrensis* / EN / Resident /
Guiana dolphin / *Sotalia guianensis* / NT / Resident (year round) / Expected to be breeding



FRENCH GUIANA

*Country Wildlife Response Profiles
A Summary of oiled wildlife response
arrangements and resources worldwide*

West Indian manatee / *Trichechus manatus* / VU / Resident /
Amazonian manatee / *Trichechus inunguis* / VU / Resident /
Giant otter / *Pteronura brasiliensis* / EN / Resident / Pupping end August to October
Brazilian tapir / *Tapirus terrestris* / VU / Resident /
Sperm whale / *Physeter macrocephalus* / VU / Resident/migratory /