



**Visitors in the urban wetland
Mirasol of Algarrobo: A threat or an
opportunity for resilience?**

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Report 1 of 3



Report 1

I was given the opportunity as a Darwin Leader to investigate how visitors are threatening the Mirasol wetland in Algarrobo Chile. My Darwin200 journey began with conservation experts Laura and Marcela from Fundación Kennedy briefing me on the historical and current state of Mirasol wetland, which is burdened by litter and pollution from the many tourists coming from Chile's capital, Santiago. The main issue and question we sought to address was: How can we empower and educate visitors to understand and protect the value of the Mirasol wetland instead of threatening it? To that end, we began our travels to the field to conduct interviews and surveys at Mirasol.

I was introduced to the Mirasol wetland by members of Fundación Kennedy and the local community. The locals informed me that the wetland used to consistently reach all the way to the beach up to 2012 creating a unique brackish water ecosystem, but now only reaches the ocean every few years during heavy rains. There are likely many reasons for this, but the community suspected that water is being illegally drained to water vineyards upstream. There are also many invasive species taking over the wetland and disrupting the ecosystem, including eucalyptus and Cyprus trees that demand a lot of water.

Despite the low water levels, we observed various endemic bird and reptilian species benefitting from the wetland ecosystem during our visit, making it clear that wetlands of all sizes are highly productive and vital ecosystems.

During our time in the field, we also met and spoke with many visitors enjoying Mirasol beach and the adjacent Pirate's Cove. The Mirasol wetland is along the walkway to the beach that gets numerous visitors, especially during the summer since it is the closest coast to the 8 million people living in Santiago. And while a lot of visitors claimed to love this place for its beauty and refuge from the city, the majority were unaware of the wetland's existence and unknowingly have put their beloved place under threat. We noted an abundance of litter, plastics, noise pollution, food and human waste, and a thriving rat population in Mirasol wetland and Pirate's Cove. Additionally, Pirate's Cove was evidently being used as a bathroom as we saw human waste and trash, polluting the local ecosystems and breeding unsanitary conditions with rats and pests.

Upon visiting the wetland and speaking with the locals and tourists, I concluded that the lack of bathrooms and trash management was a source of the pollution and rats, but the fundamental problem was the human behaviors driving these issues.



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