

## **S'ALBUFERA,... water, birds and people.**

## *Leaflet*

S'Albufera, the largest and most important wetland area in the Balearics, is a former lagoon separated from the sea by a belt of dunes, which for many centuries – but especially in the last two as a result of human influence – has filled up with sediments converting it into an extensive flood plain. The Natural Park affords protection to some 1708 hectares of marshes and dunes. .

S'Albufera traces its origins back some 18 million years, but the present wetland was formed less than 100,000 years ago. The current sea dunes are even more recent, being around 10,000 years old.

The basis of S'Albufera's ecological richness is water. The virtually permanent inundation of much of the Natural Park provides favourable conditions for vegetation growth and variety according to the depth of water, proximity of the sea and type of terrain. The range of plant species gives cover and food to a multitude of animals, which in turn are food for many more. Thanks to the abundance of water the diversity of living organisms (known as biodiversity by scientists) is very high, indeed S'Albufera's suite of ecosystems supports the greatest biodiversity of any site in the Balearics.

S'Albufera derives a large part of its water from rain falling on some 640 square kilometres of north and central Mallorca, by way of seasonal streams ("torrents") and springs from subterranean aquifers, known as "ullals". A relatively small amount of seawater intrusion in summer nevertheless has a particular effect on the vegetation and fauna.

The biological description of vegetation must begin with the dominant reed (*Phragmites australis*), saw-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) and reedmace (*Typha latifolia*), large emergent plants growing in the flooded areas. Also important are the species which live submerged in the canals, small lagoons (known as 'llisers') and flooded marshes. Among the most notable we may find fennel pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*), spineless hornwort (*Ceratophyllum submersum*) or duckweeds (*Lemna sp.*) The more brackish areas support rushes (*Juncus* species) and glassworts (*Salicornia* and *Arthrocnemum* species). The main trees are white poplar (*Populus alba*), elm (*Ulmus minor*) and tamarisk (*Tamarix africana*).

We must not overlook the wide variety of fungi recorded: 66 species so far. One of these, the toadstool *Psathyrella halofila*, was discovered new to science in 1992 and is still only known from S'Albufera.

We can also note the wealth of fish: 29 species, the majority marine in origin. The most numerous are the eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) and a variety of mullet species. Among the amphibians the marsh frog (*Rana perezi*) population stands out, and reptiles include the water snake (*Natrix maura*) and European pond terrapin (*Emys orbicularis*). The most abundant mammals are the rodents (rats and mice) and bats (8 species), including important rarities such as the Barbastelle bat (*Barbastrella barbastrellus*).

The number and diversity of invertebrates is enormous. The most notable groups are the dragonflies, flies (including endemic species), spiders and, above all, the moths – of which more than 300 species are currently known.

However, the most celebrated and appreciated group is the birds. Birds which fly effortlessly between marshlands separated by hundreds or thousands of kilometres find food and shelter amongst the lagoons and canals. S'Albufera is the only site in the archipelago where over two-thirds the total number of species recorded in the Balearics have been seen - some 200 different species.

The 61 species breeding in the Park comprise both sedentary species (remaining throughout the year) and summer visitors which migrate south once breeding is over.

A third group comprises visitors from the north which come for the coldest months of winter. Large flocks of ducks (shoveler, wigeon, teal...), a range of heron species, starlings... Every winter the numbers of these main species comfortably exceed 10,000 individuals.

Migrants are species which visit the Park in the course of their journeys, remaining in transit for just a few days. They include substantial numbers of garganey, ruff and other waders, hirundines...

Lastly there are the vagrants, or occasional visitors, such as cranes, glossy ibis or spoonbills. The attached list gives the most interesting species for visitors and for nature conservation.

## **S'Albufera de Mallorca: Natural Park**

The Balearic Government declared S'Albufera a National Park on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1988, constituting the first naturally protected area in the Balearics. This declaration authorises the conservation and restoration of the Park's natural and cultural values, the empowerment of educational and scientific activities and contact between man and nature, as well as the Park's harmonisation in the local and Mallorca-wide socioeconomic contexts, with its principal function the conservation of nature.

## **S'Albufera de Mallorca. Special Protection Area for Birds**

In 1979, the European Commission adopted the 79/409/CE Directive for the conservation of wild birds. Based on the premise that birds are a Europe-wide heritage shared by all, the Directive sets out to promote the conservation and suitable management of all wild birds living within the European Community. Within it protection measures are defined, and restrictions applied for quarry species and the sale of wild birds. In addition, the Directive identifies habitat protection as a prerequisite for species protection. At such sites, known as Special Protection Areas for Birds (SPAs), measures are adopted to avoid any habitat deterioration or other disturbance which may affect the birds. S'Albufera has been a SPA from the moment Spain became a member of the European Community.

## **S'Albufera de Mallorca and the Ramsar Convention**

On 5<sup>th</sup> December 1989 the Council of Ministers registered S'Albufera de Mallorca in the list of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (with special reference to water birds), better known as the Ramsar Convention (Iran 1971). The governments which ratified it committed themselves to promote the protection and the balanced use of wetlands.

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### **VISITING HOURS**

Visiting hours at the Park are from 09.00h to 18.00h between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September, and from 09.00h to 17.00h between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 31<sup>st</sup> March, A VISITING PERMIT IS REQUIRED which can be obtained (FREE) at the Reception Centre.

For group visits a special permit is required and this must be applied for in advance, please enquire at the Reception Centre (open 9 to 16 h.)

### **ACCESS**

**ACCESS TO THE PARK IS ON FOOT OR BY BICYCLE.** Cars can be parked in the side-streets of residential areas adjacent to the park entrance (Englishmen's Bridge) or in the dedicated parking area opposite the Hotel Parc Natural. People with mobility problems should seek special access arrangements by telephoning the Park. (+34 971 892250).

### **RULES AND REGULATIONS**

- Respect nature and the values which have made this protected area possible. The gathering of flowers, plants, animals or their remains is not permitted.
- Always move around using the paths indicated, at slow speed on bicycles and respect the existing signposting.
- Bicycles with more than two wheels are not permitted.
- Respect the Park's visiting hours.
- Noise disturbs animals and the other visitors. **MOVE AROUND IN SILENCE.**
- It is not permitted to eat in the hides or to have picnics in the Park. In all cases, occupy the tables at Sa Roca for brief periods only.
- Sporting activities are not permitted in the Park (jogging, horse riding, mountain biking, etc...).
- Domestic animals (especially dogs) frighten the fauna. Their entrance to the Park is not permitted.
- In the case of a breach of regulations Park personnel may revoke the visiting permit.
- Share in the Conservation of the park by making known to us any suggestions you have for the improvement of this protected natural area.

The Park address is:

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