

OUR NATURAL HERITAGE

PINK LAGOON. TORREVIEJA. ALICANTE

The Lagunas de la Mata and Torrevieja is a Spanish protected natural area located in the Alicante province, Valencian Community. Together with the neighboring natural parks of El Hondo and the Salinas de Santa Pola, they form a triangle of wetlands of crucial importance for the development of the biological cycles of numerous species that use it both in their migrations and in their nesting or wintering.

The Park is made up of two lagoons separated from each other by an anticline called "El Chaparral". A channel joins both depressions that, in addition, are artificially communicated with the sea through two other channels known as "Acequiones", thus forming a unit of salt exploitation.

Since the 18th century, the lagoons have been exploited for the extraction of salt and its export throughout Europe. The organized salt exploitation began after observing the good quality of the product obtained. After verifying that the conditions for carrying out this task were better in Torrevieja, the farm was moved. It would not be until the 1980s when awareness of the nature that surrounds this environment was debated for its protection. It was declared as a natural park by the Generalitat Valenciana, on December 10, 1996.

Regarding the fauna, the salt flats are an exceptional enclave for birds that migrate or inhabit them. It is one of the greatest richness of this natural park. Without any doubt, one of the most appreciated species in the park is the common flamingo, which reaches 2,000 specimens during the breeding season. There are thousands of other large and small birds that live in winter in the salt flats and some very peculiar crustaceans due to the large amount of salt in the water.

THE NATURAL MARINE RESERVE OF TABARCA ISLAND. TABARCA. ALICANTE

The natural space of the Tabarca Marine Reserve is made up of the island itself as well as the islets of La Cantera, La Galera and La Nao. Several hectares of maritime land surrounding them are also included, where human activities are restricted. The center of the Tabarca Marine Reserve is the island itself. This is also known as "The Flat Island" due to the total horizontality of its orography. It is a justified name, since its terrain does not exceed 15 meters in its highest area. The geography of the Tabarca Marine Reserve is strongly conditioned by the small size of the island and its climatic conditions.

The marine environment of this reserve presents waters of great clarity and transparency; in Tabarca the waters are very transparent, with an effectively illuminated thickness between 22.5 and 47.5 meters deep, this allows plants to live at greater depths and therefore biological communities are especially rich. The seabed of Tabarca presents, due to its protection since 1986 and its little or no

pollution by wastewater, an excellent enclave for the development of communities and species worthy of protection.

It is common to see submerged divers swimming through it; Remember that it is strictly forbidden to dive with bottles or to carry out underwater fishing in all the surrounding waters and any extraction of marine animal or plant organisms and mineral materials, except those expressly authorized. Some divers leave from the beach or coves of Tabarca, while others descend from the anchored boats; especially in the eastern part of the island. It is also forbidden for ships to anchor and spend the night there; they must arrive and depart every day. Normally, the boats return every night to the nearby port of Santa Pola. These protective measures have made Tabarca one of the least polluted marine areas on the Valencian coast, which represents the great biological value of this reserve.

THE PALMERAL IN ELCHE (PALM GROVE). ELCHE. ALICANTE

The Historic Palm Grove of Elche is a unique cultural landscape, of exceptional value and universal significance. It is a living cultural legacy of Al-Andalus, medieval Muslim Spain. It is an extraordinary exponent of sustainability in the agricultural development of fragile ecosystems. In addition, it has a characteristic feature that makes it different from the rest of the palm groves of the world, namely: "the white palm", a living relic of the ancient Mediterranean palm culture.

Also known as Huertos de Palmeras de Elche, it is a large expanse of palm trees within the Spanish city of Elche. With 200,000 and 300,000 specimens, it is the largest palm grove in Europe occupying some 500 hectares and one of the largest in the world, only surpassed by some Arab palm groves. The best known complexes of the Palmeral are the Municipal Park, the Huerto de Abajo, the Huerto del Cura and the Huerto del Chocolatero. Among all, the best and oldest specimens are in the so-called Huerto del Cura, within the great Palmeral. The name comes from its owner in 1918. Some specimens are more than 300 years old. It must be taken into account that the palm tree has an average life of 250 to 300 years. These palm trees are of the same species as those of Iran. They are date palm trees and it is in December when they bear fruit. In addition there are some other tropical species.

The palm tree is, in Elche, a sacred good. The first recognition came in 2000, when the historic Palm Grove was declared a World Heritage Site. In this way, not only the work of our ancestors was rewarded, giving life to that palm grove that now configures, accompanies and enriches us; but rather to the people of Elche and Elche who, over the centuries, have managed to preserve it as an indissoluble part of their way of being, even beyond its economic profitability as a crop.