

# CULTURE & TRADITION

The exploitation of this protected area as a salt producing area is very old, probably prior to the Roman occupation. In the Middle Ages there were three small salt flats that were in the hands of the Crown for 750 years. The monarchs used to establish the price of salt and rent the territory to the nobility or religious orders.



Salinas de San Pedro in 1931

At the end of the Nineteenth Century the salt flats were privatized, and were gained by Mr. Manuel García de Coterillo, who carried out a major remodeling joining the three existing salt flats. Shortly after the Mota de los Molinos was built, place where we can find the Quintín and La Calcetera Windmills, which raised the water from the Mar Menor to take it to the salt flats. In 1917 a reforestation was carried creating the Coterillo Pine Forest, to prevent the salt ponds to fill to the brim with the sand of the dunes.

The processes occurring in the salt flats have hardly changed over the centuries. It consists of the evaporation by the sun and the wind of the water coming from the Mar Menor, which passes through three types of ponds: storage, heaters and crystallizers. These ponds are reducing their size and depth, progressively increasing its salinity, until the salt precipitates accumulating in the bottom of the crystallizing ponds, very unique for their pink color. The harvest takes place between September and October, collecting around 90,000 tons of excellent quality sea salt.



Las Encañizadas

In one of the communications that connect the Mar Menor with the Mediterranean Sea, locally called "golas", a fishing gear known as Las Encañizadas takes place. This form of fishing, of medieval origin, consists of a network of reeds firmly fixed in the mud like a maze, where fish are led into a trap, awaiting capture.



Mud Baths

Always facing to sea, the inhabitants from this environment have lived from the exploitation of salt and fishing. This is also evidenced by traditions like the Virgen del Carmen pilgrimage and the gastronomy, with dishes like Caldero (a plate of rice) or salted fishes. They are also famous the mud baths, with beneficial properties for health.

# THE PARK RECOMMENDS



Visitor's Center "Las Salinas"

At Las Salinas Visitor Centre you can find information to discover and enjoy this Protected Area. We recommend you a visit to the Exhibition and Projection Rooms where you can get a first contact with the natural and cultural values of the Park. In addition, you have a binoculars loan service to be able to see birds up close from the different bird hides located in the Regional Park. Likewise, there is a network of signposted itineraries, both walking and cycling, that cross the Salinas in San Pedro.

## On your visit we recommend you to:

- Leave your vehicle in the authorized parking spaces.
- Always walk on authorized paths. Creating shortcuts deteriorates the soil. Always walk on the walkways and, never on the dunes.
- Keep pets on a lead and please clean up if necessary. Municipal laws do not allow the presence of pets on beaches. Find out beforehand about the existence of dog beaches.
- Respect the native fauna and flora.
- Avoid making noise as it could bother the wildlife and other visitors.
- Remember that it is forbidden to make fire camp and overnight parking.
- Take responsibility for the waste you generate, take it home or use the containers. Please remember that butts and any food waste are also considered rubbish.
- In the Mud Baths please remove the mud in the same pond in which you applied it, not in the Mar Menor.
- In summer avoid the central hours of the day, protect yourself from the sun and carry plenty of water in your bag.
- In case of emergency, call 112.

**For more information:**  
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# Life in the Salt

# INTRODUCTION

The Salinas y Arenales in San Pedro del Pinatar Regional Park is a wetland located between the Mar Menor and the Mediterranean Sea, which has 856 hectares of land, distributed between the towns of San Javier and San Pedro del Pinatar.

This environment has been shaped by humans because of the conditions for salt production: scarce rainfall, high insolation and prevailing east winds. These characteristics, along with centuries of salt extraction, have given rise to different environments, with a flora and fauna adapted to these unique circumstances.

Despite its little surface, its natural and cultural values make it protected both nationally and internationally. In 1992 it was declared Regional Park and at the same time, became part of the Natura 2000 network. Later was designated a Wetland of International Importance according to the Ramsar Convention (1994) and in 1998 it was declared a Special Protection Area for birds (SPA). Together with the Mar Menor and other coastal areas in 2001 it became a part of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI). In 2019 the Master Plan for the Use and Management of the Regional Park was approved, becoming a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This plan is essential for the management and conservation of this environment.



# L ANDSCAPE



## Crystallizing Ponds

The way we see today the Regional Park is the result of the close relationship that humans have had for centuries with nature in search of the precious treasure of salt.

The saline waters, great protagonists of the landscape, travel from pond to pond helped by the experience of

the salt factory workers. They are in charge of opening the wooden gates located in the "motas", a term which refers to the long sand and stone dams built by humans to delimit the different ponds.

Without a doubt the most striking thing is the pink color of the ponds where the salt crystallizes, caused by microorganisms that survive in these extreme environments.

Between the salt flats and the sea, we find the salt marshes, in whose soils the water appears and disappears and the vegetation acquires reddish tonalities.

The horizontality of the landscape barely breaks Coterillo Pine Forest, whose trees appear lying on the sands due to incessant wind, loaded with salts coming from the sea.



Pine Forest

Before reaching the Mediterranean Sea, dunes and beaches show us a landscape in continuous evolution. This landscape was formed in the past by the sand that travelled from the mouth of the Segura River with the help of the Ocean currents.

Two more landscapes complete the mosaic of colors and curious shapes: Las Encañizadas, the natural and shallow connection between the Mar Menor and the Mediterranean Sea, and the water channel that surrounds the Park, which is in charge of collecting runoff waters and bring them to the sea.

# F AUNA

The animals that inhabit the salt ponds are very different from those of the Mar Menor and Mediterranean Sea, despite its closeness. The extreme salinity of water is only resisted by the tiniest beings, like the brine shrimp (*Artemia salina*).



Brine Shrimp (*Artemia salina*)

The only fish that lives in the Salinas is the Spanish toothcarp (*Aphanius iberus*), unique to the Iberian Peninsula and in danger of extinction. The greater flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) is another great example of adaptation of life in salt flats. Since, among others things, they use their beak to filter shrimps in order to feed themselves. The salt ponds shores and the beaches are a buffet for waders, whose beaks and legs are adapted to extract small insects and mollusks from the mud.



Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)

Throughout black winged stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) and avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) can also be seen. However, it is only in autumn and winter when we can see godwits (*Limosa* sp.), sandpipers and dunlins (*Calidris* sp.) joining the group.



Baby Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)

Other featured water birds are the shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*), a duck of colorful plumage, several seagull species, diver bids such as black necked grebes (*Podiceps nigricollis*) or terns like the little tern (*Sternula albifrons*) that, arrived from Africa each spring, find in the Regional Park an ideal place to expand its family.

Other animals such as lizards, snakes and the chameleon (*Chamaeleo chamaeleon*) watch over us from their hiding places.



Chameleon (*Chamaeleo chamaeleon*)

# F LORA

In addition to the demanding climatological conditions of this Region (strong insolation and scarce rains, usually torrential), the Salinas de San Pedro add new challenges for the survival of plants. Next to the salty water ponds and between the dunes, an impermeable and loaded down with salt soil, sometimes waterlogged, is inhabited only by salt-loving plants (halophytic), like the sea lettuce (*Limonium* sp.), rushes (*Juncus* sp.) and glassworts (*Sarcocornia fruticosa* and *Arthrocnemum macrostachyum*).



Glasswort (*Sarcocornia fruticosa*)

In the outer dunes from the sea, a small pine forest (*Pinus halepensis*) get our attention, due to its knocked down logs by the wind. In these sand dunes two botanical gems are also preserved: the coastal phoenician juniper (*Juniperus turbinata*), in danger of extinction in the Region of Murcia, and the Mar Menor rockrose (*Helianthemum marmarinense*), unique to this environment.



Coastal Phoenician Juniper (*Juniperus turbinata*)

On the beachfront, the dunes are in continuous movement and lacking in nutrients. They provide space to the flexible marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*). To protect themselves from splashes and the sea wind, some species like the cretan trefoil (*Lotus creticus*) grow lying down upholstering the landscape of a showy yellow color. Other species such as the sea holly (*Eryngium maritimum*) coat its "skin" with a waterproof wax that protects it. Already on the shore of the beach, the accumulations of leaves and balls of marine plants remains announce the presence of neptune grass (*Posidonia oceanica*). Their underwater meadows provide shelter and food for thousands of species and at the same time they clean and oxygenate the waters.



Cretan Trefoil (*Lotus creticus*)

