

Fichas Técnicas de Humedales Mediterráneos / Mediterranean Wetlands Technical Data

Messolonghi saltworks (Hellas)/ Salinas de Messolonghi (Grecia)

Geographical location

Messolonghi saltworks is located west of the town of Messolonghi (West of Central Greece). It is the biggest saltworks in Greece occupying an area of 1.240 ha. The site is part of the large wetland complex of "Messolonghi and Aetolikon lagoons, and Acheloos and Evinos estuaries". This complex has been created by the rivers Acheloos and Evinos.

Wetland type

Semi-artificial saline ecosystem having an ample gradient of characteristics starting from a regular saline wetlands (pre-basins) up to extreme hypersaline meadows (crystallisers).

Vegetation types

In the area of Messolonghi lagoons there have been distinguished 12 different vegetation types, out of which several are met in the saltworks themselves (c.g. *Salicornietum europaeae*, *Salicornietum fruticosae*, *Salicornio Haloenemetum strobilaei*, *Arthroenemetum*).

Biological characteristics

Within the area of the saltworks alone there have been found 66 taxa of higher plants. i.e. 62 species with 4 subspecies. Among them the most species-rich are the *Chenopodiaceae* (encompassing a big number of halophytes) and the salt-tolerant *Graminae*, represented by 11 and 18 species, respectively. These numbers do not include a big number of species found in the non-saline parts of the saltworks. Among the animals most abundant are the planktonic taxa (8. including *Artemia*), four families of sea-water insects, and the common saltworks fish, *Aphanius fasciatus*. The total number of bird species in 1991 was 71, out of which 57 used the saltworks for resting, feeding and breeding.

Land use

Part of the saltworks area has been used for making salt since several centuries whereas there has been a considerable expansion in the 60s. Any ambitions as to bigger expansions have been abandoned since then.

Protection status

As part of the Messolonghi lagoons the saltworks is a Ramsar site and constitutes a SPA (Special Protection Area) according to the Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds. Over 40 bird species of Annex I of this Directive can be found here. The most threatened European bird species, *Numenius tenuirostris*, is reported to use the area during migration.

Environmental problems

High instability/unpredictability of the saltworks ecosystem, caused by the human activities on the site, mainly due to the big changes in the water level undertaken occasionally to regulate water flow in the saltpans. This affects not only the feeding birds, but also the breeding ones, since their nest areas can be suddenly flooded. Yet, the broader of Messolonghi lagoons since a long time is under very serious and imminent threat of deterioration due to development activities on the one hand and lack of appropriate management on the other.

Management

Development of an ACE-Biotopes project (1991-92): upgrading and construction of artificial nesting sites for terns. Better and more effective control of water level, car or animal circulation, noise caused by pump engines, as well as of hunting in the saltworks especially during the breeding period of birds. Public awareness (saltworkers, visitors, inhabitants). Environmental education in the area of the saltworks.