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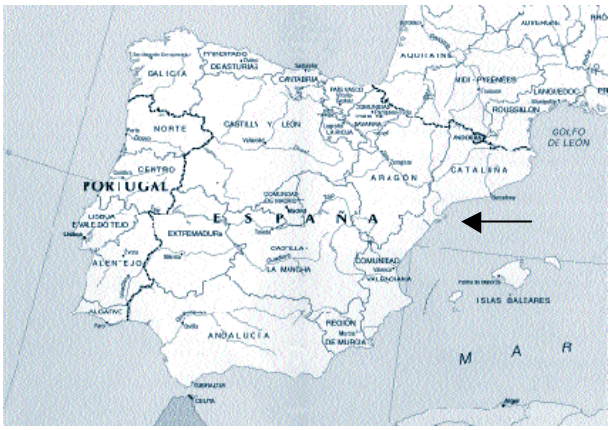

foto: Salvador Viladrich. MCM

Ebro Delta (Spain)

LOCATION

Mediterranean coast, 25 km southeast of Tortosa (Cataluña, eastern Spain). Coordinates: 40°43'N 000°44'E. Area: 7,736 ha

WTLAND TYPE

Typical example of a fluvial delta. Variety of wetlands: shallow coastal waters, sandy beaches and dunes, saline lagoons, salinas, freshwater marshes, and freshwater pools fed by groundwater springs. At the end of the 19th Century, the introduction of agriculture transformed most of the delta so that rice fields (20,000 ha). The primary natural wetland types are permanent rivers and estuarine habitats.

HYDROLOGICAL NOTES

The flooding regime is artificially regulated for rice cultivation. During the winter (November to April) low water levels are maintained, and inflow of sea water occurs. Conversely, during summer, fresh water is fed into the delta from the river, through a network of artificial channels, and high levels are maintained until October. The inundated area shrinks to a minimum between February and April.

BIOLOGICAL / ECOLOGICAL NOTES

The shallow offshore waters around the delta are extremely important as spawning and nursery areas for fish. Four of the delta's fish species are endemic to the Iberian Peninsula (e.g. Aphanius iberus). Outstanding mollusc fauna (marine and freshwater). Endemic shrimp Palaemonetes zariqueyi. Some plant species reach their northern limit in the delta (Lonicera biflora, Tamarix boveana and Zygophyllum album), while for others this is their southernmost locality (Nymphaea alba, Alnus glutinosa). Some 30,000 pairs of waterbirds nest annually, while mid-winter waterbird counts have recorded 180,000 individuals. Breeding species include Ardea purpurea, Egretta garzetta, Bubulcus ibis, Ardeola ralloides, Nycticorax nycticorax, Ixobrychus minutus, Botaurus stellaris, Netta rufina, Himantopus himantopus, Glareola pratincola, Larus audouinii (the largest colony in the world), Chlidonias hybridus, Gelochelidon nilotica, Sterna albifrons, Sterna hirundo and S. sandvicensis. In summer, up to 4,000 non-breeding Phoenicopterus ruber roseus occur. Thousands of Egretta garzetta, Bubulcus ibis, Anas platyrhynchos, A. strepera, A. Clypeata, Netta rufina, Recurvirostra avosetta and Limosa limosa).

HUMAN USES

Much of the Natural Park (including virtually all of the littoral zones) is in public ownership, although some of the major lagoons are privately owned. Hunting, fishing, shellfish harvesting, tourism and limited agriculture, aquaculture and livestock rearing.

CONSERVATION MEASURES

The site is a Natural Park. Parts of the area are Natural Reserves (Illa de Sapinya 4ha and Punta de la Banya 2,500 ha), National Hunting Refuges (Laguna de l'Encanyissada and Laguna de la Tancada), or Hunting Refuges (Punta del Fangar 500 ha, Garxal 137.5 ha, Canal Vell 17 ha, Laguna de la Tancada 312 ha). Management plan. The area is an EU Special Protection Area for wild birds. LIFE Project (SEO/BirdLife). Ramsar site from 26/03/1993.

ADVERSE FACTORS

The water is highly contaminated by agricultural chemicals and some of the lagoons (Encanyissada, Olles, Platjola) are in an advanced state of eutrophication. Other reported problems within the site include over-exploitation of natural resources (through hunting, fishing, shellfish harvesting etc.) and insufficiently regulated tourism/recreation. Dam construction in the delta's catchment has resulted in a significant decrease in the volume of sediment reaching the wetland, leading in turn to shrinkage of the delta (75 m per year in some areas).

From: A Directory of Wetlands of International Importance. Ramsar Convention Bureau and Wetlands International, 1999

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