



Foto: Victor Perez, en Ecosistemas 27-28

Las Tablas de Daimiel (Spain)

LOCATION. HYDROLOGICAL/PHYSICAL NOTES

Confluence of the Rivers Guadiana and Cigüela, about 20 km northeast of the city of Ciudad Real (Castilla-La Mancha, Spain). Coordinates: 39°09'N 003°40'W. Elevation: 600-620 m. Area: 1,928 ha. Complex of shallow pools and associated marshland, which lies in the great plain of La Mancha. The combination of plant communities makes the area a characteristic Iberian wetland. La Mancha is a depressed basin which was formed during the process of geologic uplifting. It filled up during the Tertiary Period. The resulting formation consists mainly of limestone and calcareous clays. The site receives floodwater from the permanent freshwater Río Guadiana and the seasonal brackish Río Gigüela, and groundwater from an underground water basin known as Aquifer 23. The climate is warm Mediterranean, with a continental character. The annual average rainfall is about 450 mm. Extreme summer droughts are common.

BIOLOGICAL/ECOLOGICAL NOTES

The area supports a diverse fauna, including the mammals *Lutra lutra*, *Meles meles* and *Vulpes vulpes*, 13 reptile species: *Mauremys* (or *Clemys*) *caspica* and *Emys orbicularis*, the amphibian *Hyla arborea* and the fish *Cyprinus carpio*. The area is also very important for waterbirds: *Ixobrychus minutus*, *Ardea purpurea*, *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, *Circus aeruginosus*, *Grus grus*, *Himantopus himantopus*, *Chlidonias hybridus*, *Anas strepera*, *Netta rufina*. The vegetation formations of the shallow pools and the surrounding marshland are laid out like a mosaic, according to variations in water levels, salinity and other parameters. *Limonium longibracteum* is an endemic species in La Mancha. Submergent species including *Zannichellia pedunculatus*, *Ceratophyllum demersum*, *Ruppia maritima* and *Chara aspera*. The emergent vegetation is dominated by *Phragmites australis*, *Typha* sp. and *Cladium mariscus*. *Tamarix canariensis* is the most common bush/tree. *Netta rufina*, *Anas crecca*, *Aythya nyroca*, *A. ferina*, *Ardeola ralloides*, *Nycticorax nycticorax*, *Podiceps cristatus*, *P. nigricollis*, *Panurus biarmicus* and *Acrocephalus melanopogon* also breed here.

HUMAN USES/CONSERVATION MEASURES

The reserve is almost completely owned by the state (98.3%). The site is used on a small scale by the local inhabitants, for hunting, fishing and the collection of reeds and rushes. The surrounding area is used for agriculture. Recently irrigation with water taken from the underground aquifer has expanded enormously. About 100,000 people of foreign nationalities visit the site each year, so tourism is becoming socio-economically important for the area. The site was designated a National Park in 1973. This was enlarged in 1980. It is also a UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve and an EU Special Protection Area for wild birds. The site was included in the Montreux Record in 1990, with the aim of restoration of the hydrological functioning of the upper Guadiana River, notably the sustainable use of Aquifer 23 (the "Mancha Occidental" aquifer). This implies improvements in the amounts, quality, and seasonal timing of water for the site. To this end, an Expert Commission was established in 1998. The groundwater underlying the plain of La Mancha (i.e. Aquifer 23) has been subject to over-exploitation. As a result, the Tablas started to dry out. There have also been changes in the water quality at the site, owing to the differences in chemical composition between groundwater and surface water supplies. High rainfall since 1997 has improved the short-term hydrological and ecological situation, and steps are being taken to ensure adequate long-term improvements.

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