

Levante de Almeria

Legal status	Site of Community Importance, including several Natural Monument
Foundation year	1999
Foundation text	Regional Decree n°225/1999
Management body	General Directorate of Natural Protected Areas and Environmental Services of Andalucía
Superficy	6313,5 ha
Management category (IUCN, 1994)	VI



Territory

This space is found in the northeast of the province of Almeria, and constitutes a wide band of marine area of some 50 km long distributed parallel to the coast. It is totally submerged under the seawater with the exception of two small islands: the island of San Juan de los Terreros measuring 1.1 ha and Isla Negra of 0.6 ha.



Fondos Marinos del Levante Almeriense has been a SPAMI since 2001 because it presents a high grade of naturalness over a very significant surface, thanks to the enormous development and extension of the *Posidonia oceanica* beds and the recent presence of the sea turtle.

Physical features

The surroundings of the zone present three large units: basin that collects the Quaternary materials between Vera and Cuevas de Almanzora, and finally some mountain reliefs from the tertiary period corresponding to the Alpujarride mantle in the northern most part of the area.

The sea bottoms closest to the coast are for the most part sandy, though some rocky bottoms are found, which have a volcanic origin, in the meridian portion of the area. The farthest bottoms from the coast are made up predominately of mud.

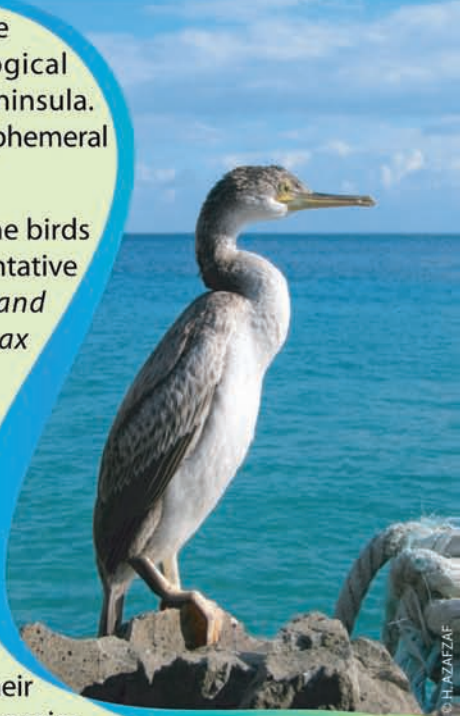
Specificities and importance

The terrestrial flora is all included in the framework of typical specimens in the biogeography of Murcia and Almeria, which due to its climatic and geological characteristics is one of the spots with the most unique flora in the entire Peninsula. The scarcity of annual rainfall is the main factor that explains the abundance of ephemeral annual plants with two endemic species

The most significant elements in the terrestrial areas are the colonies of marine birds that nest in the two islands in the north of the space. Among the most representative species are *Calonectris diomedea*, *Hydrobates pelagicus*, *Egretta garzetta* and *Bubulcus ibis* that nest in the zone, as well as *Larus audouinii*, or *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, that use the zone as a resting and feeding point.

At the sea, the principal species corresponds to seagrass of great ecological interest such as *Posidonia oceanica* and *Cymodocea nodosa*, as well as communities of brown algae with *Cystoseira mediterranea* as the most representative species or quality indicator. Other important species are *Pinna nobilis*, *Asterina pancerii*, *Dendropoma petraeum* and *Centrostephanus longispinus*.

The variety of environments and types of soil that appear in the marine medium is in direct relation with benthic communities with soft bottoms, rocky floors in their different kings, and extensive seagrass beds. There also exist notable swimming species among which *Caretta caretta*.



Threats and Pressures



The principle impacts come from an excessive pressure from commercial fishing and illegal sport fishing. Trawling fisheries, is altering the dynamic of the marine ecosystem in the zone.

The main exploitation of natural resources is the commercial fishing industry with small scale boats, and of these a large number are of a traditional style.

It is worth mentioning the intensification of underwater sport fishing, which is provoking a great pressure on some species, in particular grouper (*Epinephelus spp.*).

The marine medium has pollution due to spills of industrial waters in just one point of the entire zone.



Management

A Management Plan was adopted in 2005

The main financing comes from the Regional Environmental Department, of the Andalusian Autonomous that covers all aspects of personnel, vigilance, research, species conservation, information, value diffusion.

In the case of illegal fishing activities, the zone is under vigilance by State authorities of the Ministry of Environment, and Rural and Marine Affairs.

Exhaustive catalogues of the marine medium of the zone exist, as well as a knowledge and cartography of the principle habitats and species that characterise them, especially the beds of *Posidonia oceanica*, that dominate in the zone.

