

The present Santa Pola saltworks and the space that today constitutes El Hondo used to form a great wetland known as the Albufera de Elche, which covered almost the whole plain of Elche. Santa Pola Saltworks Nature Reserve is 2.496 hectares in size. The environments found in this natural enclave are extremely varied. The saltworks are located in the coastal zone, with its beaches and dunes. Heading from this place inland, the visitor finds a zone of permanent pools of fresh water and land with water at floor level which is temporarily flooded. The space around the inner edge of the Reserve is taken up by crops.

From road N-332, which crosses the reserve from north to south, you can enjoy the spectacular concentrations of different species of Limicolae birds which feed on the salt flats. This fact, along with the eye-catching pink colour of the tanks with greatest concentration of salt, makes the Park a very beautiful sight.

Salt extraction is the main economic activity in the zone and to a large extent, the activity that formed the present ecosystem.

The dynamics of the salt works consist in making the sea water circulate round a circuit of tanks to obtain a gradual concentration of salts as a result of evaporation. The great biological interest of the Mediterranean saltworks lies in the fact that the water circulation is not held up in winter. The tanks, which cover a large surface area, are kept flooded all year round, meaning that the ecosystem, of extraordinary importance, is maintained. The birds feed on the fish and invertebrates which get into the saltworks while the salt production benefits from the mineral richness provided by the birds' excrement. This is the reason why one of the purposes of the Nature Reserve is to foster and guarantee the continued existence of the salt business in the long-term.



Black winged stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)



Sandpiper. Wintry plumage (*Calidris alpina*)

This is the case of the flamingo, which can be observed in the Reserve in concentrations of up to 8,000 individuals, the Anatidae such as the northern shoveler, red-crested pochard, the common pochard or the green-winged teal, and Limicolae such as the avocets, the black-winged stilt, the plovers, black-tailed godwit, sandpipers of different varieties.

It is also easy to see herons, grebes, terns, black tern, seagulls, water rail, coot and moorhen.

Birds not classified as water fowl, but associated with damp ecosystems, have an important presence in Santa Pola saltworks. Specimens of the marsh harrier, Montagu's harrier, warbler and bearded tit are also to be seen in this reserve.

On the other hand, the presence in the zone of the fartet (*Aphanius iberus*), a cyprinodontid fish endemic to Valencian geography, has great biogeographical interest. The spiny-footed lizard, the Spanish *Psammodromus* and certain invertebrates difficult to locate amongst the coastal sands make the visit to the salt works even more attractive.



Vegetation

The formations of vegetation in Santa Pola SaltWorks Nature Reserve are highly varied and of great interest to the conservation.

On the coastal dunes formations of *Crucianellion maritimae* develop. On the salt marsh dominate some species of "sosas" (*Halocnemum strobilaceum*) and rushes (*Juncus sp.pl*)

The salt steppes form a belt that rounds the salt marshes. The most characteristic species through being an endemism exclusive to this place is *Limonium santapolense*

On the other hand, the marine algae are examples of the water vegetation of the coastal ecosystem proper to this zone.

In the Park there is also the ecosystem known as associated shoreline, which has plentiful of algae and marines phanerogames (*Rupia sp.pl*). Furthermore, there is an important presence of halophile hydrophytes like the algae *Lamprothamnium papolsum*.



Exhibition in the Salt Museum



Saltworks

History

Madoz's description, in 1845, confirmed the reduction of the great wetland and the separation of these two wetlands by means of a dry land. Previously, in 1700 the albufera belonged to the Duke of Arcos, who was using it for hunting and fishing exploitation. The king had granted its property to the noble.

Nevertheless, the great transformation of this natural space takes place between finals of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, as consequence of the installation of the salt exploitation . This event caused the necessary adjustment, landfill and excavation of the area the construction of rafts. The saltworks began to work in 1890 in the Pinet and immediately in Braç del Port.

Years afterwards, in the decades of the fifties and sixties, the National Institute of Settling promoted some works of reparation that affected the internal edge of the saltworks. The transformations realized with hunting purposes from the seventies had just defined the current configuration of this space.



ROUTE 1 (yellow): El Pinet

Type	On foot
Length	2 Km.
Difficulty	Not great
Approx. time taken	1 h. 15 m.

This route runs round the south eastern side of the reserve, where you can see some of its most typical environments, such as the salt pans and the dune ecosystem.

This starts in former salt-pools no longer commercially used but still maintaining the water circuit and with this their great biological wealth. Following a narrow path between the banks of the pools and in parallel to the dunes and the beach line visitors can see on their left the former

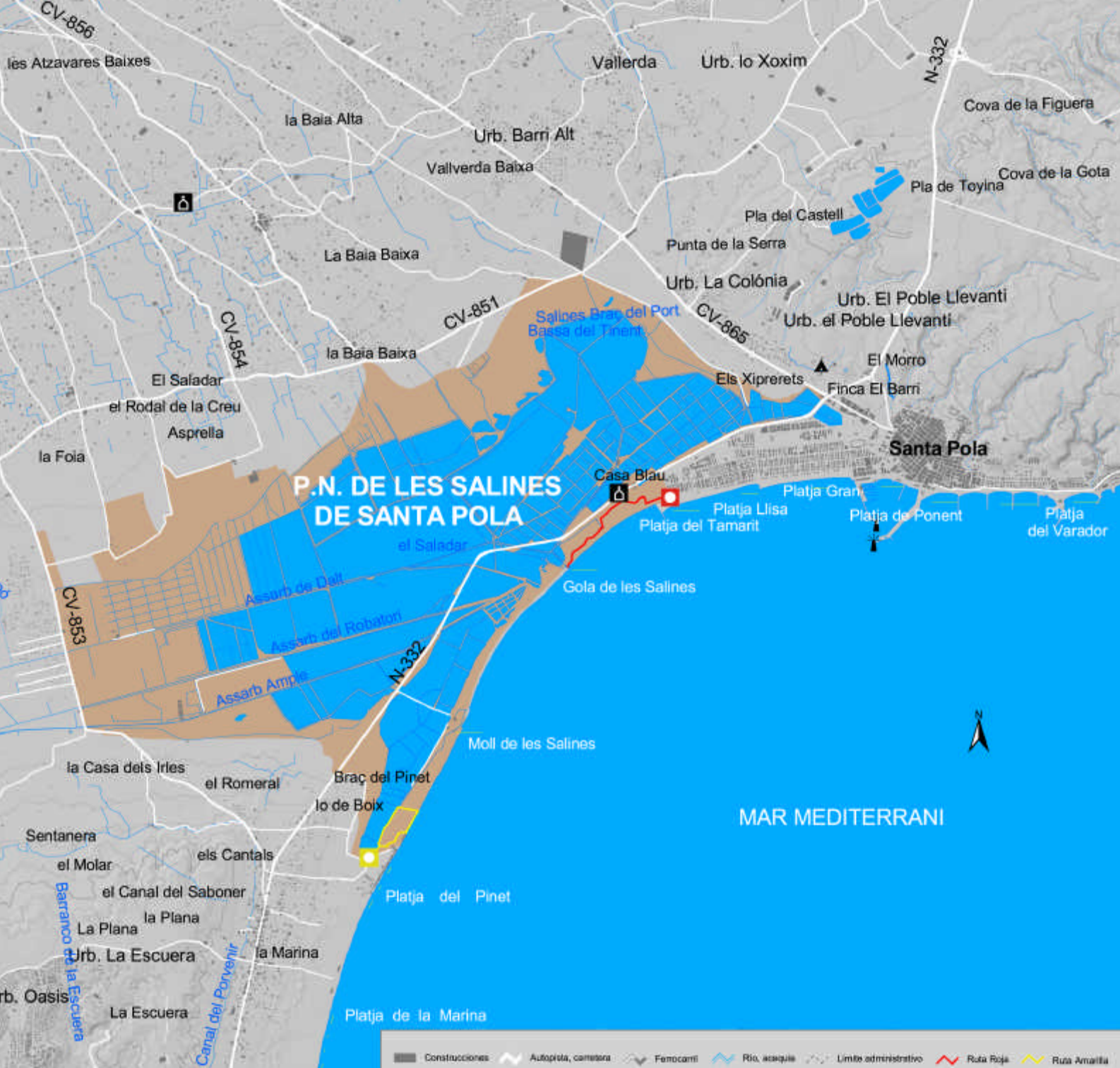
pre-concentration tanks with a large population of flamingos, avocets, black-winged stilts, little egrets, redshanks, plovers, black-tailed godwit, little terns, etc.. The abundance or presence of the different species of birds will depend on the time of year.

On the banks there is a large salt marsh vegetation with species such as *Salicornia*, *Arthrocnemum* and *Limonium*, which can develop curious adaptations to the large concentration of salt in the soil, being easy to see a crust of whitish salt covering the ground in the bare parts and above all in summer.

The channel letting sea water into the pools leads beside this path, formerly needed for obtaining the salt and today to ensure the life that inhabits them.

On the right of the path there are the slopes in the last dunes, appreciating how the vegetation gradually changes when going from a salt soil to a sandy soil, and so seeing the gradual change from a salt marsh vegetation to an intermediate vegetation of a sort of esparto grass, *Lygeum spartum*, *Thymelaea hirsuta*, rushes, coming to a proper dune vegetation formed of bird's foot, wild asparagus, *Crucionella maritima*, etc. and another repopulated one consisting of agaves, fig-marigold, Aleppo pines, stone pines and eucalyptus trees.

One kilometre from the start, the route turns to the right heading into the dunes and going through these to the beach. In this section the visitor will see all the different kinds of dunes. First of all there are the fixed dunes, so called due to the repopulation of pines and eucalyptus which





First line of dunes

was made in the early 20th century in order to control the advancing sand, the semi-fixed dunes, where the vegetation is scantier and of smaller size, where there is a predominance of dune species such as the bird's foot, European beach grass, sea holly, sea rocket, etc., going as far as the first line of dunes where you can see some mobile dunes which are not covered by any type of plants and are easily moved along by the wind.

The fauna inhabiting this zone is mainly represented by reptiles such as the ocellated lizard, fringe-toed lizard, *Psammotromus algirus*, Montpellier snake; mammals such as the shrew, pygmy white-toothed shrew, wood mice, rabbits and hares; little birds such as stonechat, shrikes and crested larks; there are also a large number of beetles.

Stop 1. First line of beach

Excellent sight of the first line of beach, dunes and the creeping vegetation that controls the advancing of the dunes by the effects of the wind. From here the way back to the starting point begins across the first line of dunes, enjoying a pleasant panoramic view with the sea in the background in which you can make out Santa Pola point with the town at its feet, the Island of Tabarca, the mouth of the River Segura and the whole coastline as far as Cape Cervera in Torrevieja.



ROUTE 2 (red): Tamarit Beach

Type	On foot
Length	3 Km.
Difficulty	Little
Approx. time taken	1 h. 30 m.

This route is between the sea and road N-332, with a strip of land going from the salt hills to the drainage channel of the Braç del Port saltworks. This is an absolutely flat zone with two differentiated settings of great value such as the salt pans and the beach.

The route starts where the residential zone of Playa Lisa ends, heading into the salt pans as it winds along to take advantage of former paths existing in the zone.

Saltworks jetty



Boat run aground on the beach

Stop 1. Saltworks jetty

A few metres from the start the visitor finds the remains of a saltworks jetty and a barge moored on the beach used in former times to transport salt to the ships that were waiting close to the coastline in order to export this.

The path goes close by the piles of salt and part of the facilities of the Braç del Port saltworks, it being possible to observe some of the tasks carried out at the business.

Going along the former paths you cover a salt marsh zone where the vegetation represented is *Salicornia*, *Arthrocnemum* and *Limonium*, and here you can observe their curious adaptations to the excessive salinity of the ground. Amongst this type of vegetation you can also find *Thymelaea*

hirsuta, *Lygeum spartum* esparto grass and other species that may withstand some degree of salinity.

In this zone the fauna mainly consists of reptiles and insects, although you may see some species of birds flying over the zone of nearby pools such as seagulls, black-tailed godwits, cormorants, herons, etc.

The road leads to a former saltworks house from which the route turns towards the beach, as far as the drainage channel of Braç del Port saltworks. This change in the ground involves a change of vegetation, seeing in this stretch species proper to dunes such as wild asparagus, bird's foot, sea holly, sea rocket, sea lily, etc. and a little spinney of repopulated Aleppo pines.



Mouth of the saltworks

You can enjoy a panoramic view along the whole route and can see right from Santa Pola point with the town at its feet, the Elche and Crevillente mountain ranges, the Maigmó, the Callosa mountain range, the Molar range, the Island of Tabarca and the whole coastline as far as Cape Cervera in Torrevieja.

Stop 2. Saltworks mouth

At this point you can see the mouth where the remainders of water from the saltworks are run into the sea. At the drainage channel you start the way back to the starting point across the beach line where the remains found on the shoreline give indications of the fauna and flora of this coast.



Visits of interest

Some of the points of interest in the zone are:

- Santa Pola port.
- Dunes and mouth of the River Segura.
- Queen Sofía Park in Guardamar del Segura.
- Archaeological and Ethnological Museum at Guardamar Culture Centre.
- El Fondo Nature Reserve.
- La Mata and Torrevieja Lagoons Nature Reserve.
- Island of Tabarca.
- Santa Pola castle-fortress. (This 16th century building currently houses the marine and sea aquarium)
- Cura de Elche Gardens.
- Elche Municipal park.
- Elche Contemporary Art Museum.
- Santa Pola Municipal Aquarium.

Accommodation

There is a wide range of hotel accommodation available in Guardamar del Segura, Santa Pola or La Marina. There are also a large number of camping sites located in the main tourist centres.

Cuisine

In Santa Pola, as on the whole coastline of the Valencian Community, the visitor can enjoy a wide range of rice dishes, some of which are the arroz a banda or the paella marinera. Other typical dishes of local cooking are also of interest, such as stew and meatballs. Nevertheless, the great fishing fleet and the richness of its waters make Santa Pola a city with excellent fish. We advise you to try plain and simple fish and seafood, with no need to opt for elaborate dishes.

Accesses

The Reserve is reached from road N-332 which links Cartagena and Alicante, taking the turnoff at kilometre 87.4, located close to Santa Pola town centre.