

01. Albufera de Valencia – Spain



Lake Albufera de Valencia is a large coastal lagoon, located on the western Mediterranean coast, 16 km south of the city of Valencia. A wide sand dune peninsula separates it from the sea and stretches over 30km. The lagoon is fed by streams, rivers and irrigation channels. Approximately, two thirds of the site are used for rice cultivation. The habitat's diversity is complemented by the untransformed part of the lagoon with its extensive reed-bed islands and fringe, salt marshes, dune systems and seashore. The site is home to a large number of endangered and rare plants and fish species. More than 250 bird species find shelter in the lagoon sporadically or regularly, 90 of which breed there, while large numbers of staging and wintering waterfowl may also be found.

The region bears evidence of human habitation of thousands of years, supported by paleontological findings. Before the arrival of the Romans in the area, Valencia's territory was inhabited by the Iberian people. They were later succeeded by the Greeks, Romans, Visigoths and Muslims. Archaeological findings and historical sources testify that the region was heavily Romanised. However, even greater influence was exercised by the Muslims.

The reserve is threatened by pollution, drainage and poaching. In addition, urban and tourist development overload the environment immensely. The water quality is affected and the problem is intensified by the inflow of urban sewage and industrial pollution from nearby areas. Despite the adverse factors imposed on the wetland though, the site preserves its unique cultural character. The local society maintains its bonds with nature, through which it has survived, evolved and developed its exceptional heritage.

As a response to these threats, a monitoring mission from the Ramsar Convention Secretariat was organised recently and its final report will soon be available.