

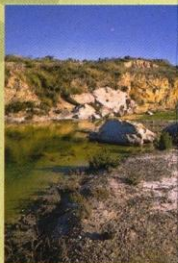
physical environment

Because of the severe drought in this area together with the irregular rainfalls and the violent nature of torrential rainstorms from time to time, the land has been modelled into numerous ravines and strange arid shapes, such as the "piping". On the other hand, some other geological formations are quite interesting too, such as the volcanic materials of Fortunitas in Cabecicos Negros in Fortuna.



The interest in its preservation dates back from 1917 (National Park Laws Catalogue 1916). There is also a geothermic deposit, the source of thermal waters in the Fortuna spa.

This Protected Landscape is considered as a type of wetland, associated to watercourses. It presents a complex net of drainage where some stretches are permanently watered and some others just



temporally and with a variety in the saline conditions. The high level of salt in water is due to the nature of the soil, to the aridness of the climate and human activity (expansion of irrigated lands and the use of saline waters for irrigation).

This Protected Landscape is considered as a type of wetland, associated to watercourses.

suggestions for visitors

- You are in a protected area of beautiful landscape and great natural value, which we attempt to preserve for the future generations. So during your visit try not to forget...
- Use authorised roads and footpaths.
- Domestic animals must be held.
- Camping and/or caravanning are not permitted in the area.
- Respect private propriety.
- Do not disturb neither harm animals and plants.
- Do not light fire unless authorised to do so.
- Please, use the garbage bins.
- For emergency, call number 112.

more information

- Consejería de Desarrollo Sostenible y Ordenación del Territorio
(Council of Sustainable Development)
Tel.: 968 22 89 37/38 • Fax: 968 22 89 38
- Sistema de Información Geográfica y Ambiental (SIGA)
(Environmental and Geographic Information System)
www.carm.es/medioambiente/
- Queries and Suggestions:
medioambiente@listas.carm.es

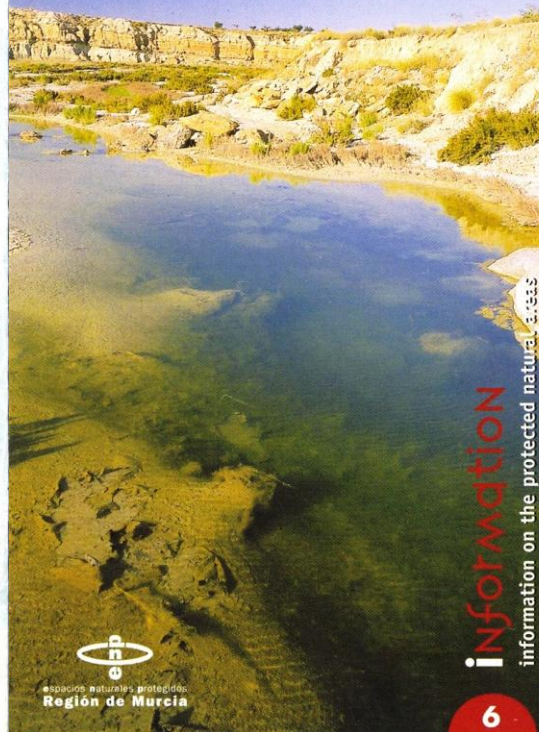


Región de Murcia

Consejería de Desarrollo Sostenible y Ordenación del Territorio
Dirección General del Medio Natural



Protected Landscape
Ajaque y Rambla Salada



DESEÑO: MICHU. MAPAS: GRIFFINUS SAN JONÉS. D.L. MU/87

information on the protected natural areas

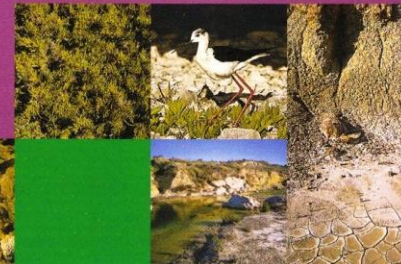
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introduction

This Protected Landscape lies on a surface-area of about 1,632 hectares and belongs to the municipalities of Fortuna, Abanilla, Santomera and Molina de Segura. This inner wetland has been proposed as a Site of Community Importance because the singularity of its ecosystem and declared

Special Protection Bird Area due to the existence of an important nesting population of black-winged stilt. Thus, it is included in the European Natura 2000 Network.

It starts in Baños de Fortuna (a natural spa), known as Rambla de las Contendas. Four kilometres downstream it meets with the watercourse that irrigates the Contiendo plains and with the small Sanel river basin and about 800 meters further down with the Baño watercourse coming from Derramadores wetlands and the Miraflores gully. This network of water streams makes up the head of the Ajaque. Further down the Tajo-Segura Transfer, the Ajaque stream joins to the waters coming from the Ajaque wetlands and, finally meets the Rambla Salada in the strait giving way to the Santomera reservoir.



found

There is a wide variety of animal life in this area. The Santomera reservoir and Rambla Salada and Ajauque wetlands give shelter to some populations of water birds, such as mallards and grey herons,



Black-necked grebe

which live here all year round. Some other species usually nest here such as the Kentish plover and the black-winged stilt or winter in the zone, coming from colder places, such as the black-necked grebe, the northern shoveler, etc. In this type of habitats there are Iberian pool frogs and fish like the mosquito fish and the carp. Small birds inhabiting the giant reeds are the reed warbler and the great reed warbler, whereas in winter-time the reed bluethroat can be easily



Common stonechat



Robin

found. Other birds commonly found all year round are the Cetti's warbler, the serin, etc. Ajauque wetland is used as a dormitory by the cattle egret, exceeding a population of a thousand birds. Starlings and jackdaws are also seen in winter. Some other bird species nest in the salt marshes such as the crested lark the stone curlew, the spectacled warbler and the Montagu's harrier together with the stonechat, the fan-tailed warbler and the robin in winter.



Crested lark

Amongst the amphibious is worth mentioning the natterjack toad, and the red-tailed spiny footed lizard among reptiles. Mammals are represented by hares, Spanish shrews and weasels. Pinewoods give shelter to great tits, long-tailed tits and predatory birds such as the short-toed eagle. Finally, some species

Vegetation

This landscape is characterised by the presence of saline waters. In those river beds where these waters flow permanently, the high saline condition limits the appearance aquatic plants although certain seaweeds can be found. The *Ruppia maritima* grows here. The distribution of giant reeds is associated to sources of subterranean fresh waters.



Sea lavender

When water fluctuations increase, different vegetal communities mingle up, and thus it is usual to find rushes next to giant reeds. In the salt marshes there are diverse saltbushes such as the glasswort. Together with the salt cedar, they represent the typical vegetation in wetlands. The *Anabasis hispanica* and the sea lavenders grow in higher lands. Some other

species such as the esparto grass, atriplex, glassworts, etc. grow in slopes and abandoned crops.

It is worth mentioning that this area also has particular vegetal communities; gypsum species due to the presence of gypsum, thermophilic bushes and the date palms (of a great cultural value).



Palm tree

Men and Landscape

The Abanilla-Fortuna basin is one of the driest in the region of Murcia. Agriculture has been the main economical activity in this area and it has modelled the scenery. Most of the original lands were used for dry farming (olive, fig and almond

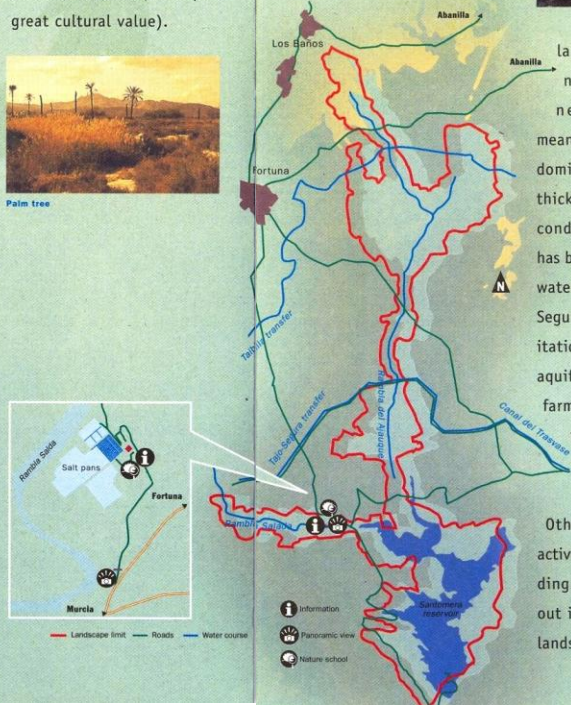
trees, wheat and barley easily grow here). Scarce irrigated



lands were located in the narrow fertile lowlands near river sources; meanwhile, wild vegetation is dominated by some kinds of thickets well adapted to arid conditions. Nowadays, there has been a change because the waters coming from the Tajo-Segura Transfer and the exploitation of the Ascoy-Sopalmo aquifer. Thus, traditional dry farming and natural vegetation has been replaced by a great extension of non-natural irrigated lands.

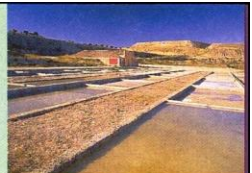
Other important economic activity is extensive stockbreeding. Shepherding is carried out in scrublands and wastelands all year round and in

wetlands during summertime. There are some traces of other activities here, now abandoned,



such as the old quarry in Fortunitas where paving stones were made in Los Cabecios Negros, and salt for domestic use in Rambla Salada.

In the surrounding area there are important archaeological remains, the most outstanding ones in Baños de Fortuna (natural spa), such as the roman pools (1st -3rd century A.C.), El Castillejo (an Iberian settlement located in a small hill from 1st -2nd centuries B.C.), Cuevas Blancas and a valuable cultural and urban complex of buildings in Los Baños. Moreover, there is a Park Reception and Nature Study Centre in the Salinas de Rambla Salada.



The Park Suggests

Besides visiting the Nature Study Centre and the old saltworks, visitors can go for a walk to different landscapes in the Rambla Salada and the Ajauque wetland, in order to know about the vegetation in the area and its adaptation to the high saline conditions (giant reeds, salt cedars, saltbushes and some other thickets). Birdlife in this zone is very interesting as well.

Any season is a good one to visit this protected landscape, but spring and autumn are the best ones to birdwatching.

