

## Ramsar Information Sheet

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**1. Date this sheet was completed:**

28 February 1997

**2. Country:**

Portugal

**3. Name of wetland:**

Ria de Alvor (Alvor lagoon)

**4. Geographical co-ordinates:**

37°08'N 008°37' W

**5. Altitude:**

maximum 29 metres; minimum 0 metres

**6. Area:**

1454 ha

**7. Overview**

Coastal lagoon on sandy soils. The wetland system is separated from the sea by two sand-spits that form a natural barrier across the mouth of the Alvor estuary. A narrow channel maintains the system open to the sea by scouring of water flowing through a narrow channel, from the estuary into the sea with ebbing tide. Permanent freshwater inputs upstream from three small creeks and a narrow river (Alvor river) running across alluvial plains that are used for agriculture.

**8. Wetland type:**

marine-coastal : A, E, F, G, H

man-made: 3, 4, 6

**9. Ramsar Criteria:**

1a, 1c, 2b, 2c, 2d, 4b

Most significant criterion applicable to the site: 1c - 2b - 4b

**10. Map of site included:**

yes

**11. Name and address of compiler:**

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**12. Justification of criteria selected under point 9:**

Despite its comparatively small size, this area is a specially noteworthy site in the South Coast of Portugal, representative of wetland values there (and conservation problems too!). Birds represent one important part of the ecosystem but the area is mostly valued for its aquatic life. This includes shellfish productions that are relevant at the national scale.

**13. General location:**

The most important towns nearby are LAGOS (10 km to the West) and PORTIMÃO (7 km to the East) in the ALGARVE region (NUTS II). Average population estimates are 21526 for Lagos and 38833 for Portimão, but these numbers are much higher during the summer months.

**14. Physical features:**

Shallow sedimentary basin of natural origin, formed by the combined action of semidiurnal tides and coastal sediment transport with accretion of particles carried down into the lagoon by upstream circulation.

**15. Hydrological values:**

The sand dune belt is extremely important for shoreline stabilisation. The whole wetland plays an important role in flood control and groundwater recharge.

**16. Ecological features:**

Sand dunes with characteristic vegetation on the seafront (*Cakile maritima*, *Elymus farctus*), backed by mobile dunes (*Ammophila arenaria*, *Crucianella maritima*) and also stable dunes (*Artemisia campestris*) a little back from the beach. Inside the lagoon there are intertidal sand and mud flats, tidal salt marshes (*Arthrocnemum sp.*, *Suaeda vera*, *Limoniastrum monopetalum*), fish ponds (intensive and extensive) and salt pans.

**17. Noteworthy flora:**

Area of great botanical value, with *Linaria algarviana* (3-5% of the world population) and *Thymus camphoratus* (3-5% of the world population).

**18. Noteworthy fauna:**

This area is an important stopover site for many trans-saharian passerines. The breeding avifauna includes *Himantopus himantopus* (>70 birds - 1% of the Portuguese breeding population), *Charadrius alexandrinus* (320 birds - 8 to 16 % of the Portuguese breeding population) and *Sterna albifrons* (50 birds - 12 to 17% of the Portuguese population). Other important fauna occurring at the site include *Mauremys leprosa* (Reptilia), *Discoglossus galganoi* and *Bufo calamita* (Amphibia). The Otter (*Lutra lutra*) is a regular visitor to this area.

Described in 1994 the butterfly *Hypotia alvorella* (Pyrilidae) was previously unknown to science. Apparently unrecorded elsewhere, apart from one poor specimen taken in 1980, in north Africa.

**19. Social and cultural values:**

Important fish production values, and commercial shellfish productions coexisting with saltmarshes and traditional salt pan complexes. Touristic occupation and building pressures around the area may threaten the conservation of the wetland values there. Alvor is an important Roman archaeological site.

**20. Land tenure/ownership of:**

- (a) site: most of the seashore and the intertidal zone are public and they are managed by the administration. Legal competencies for management are shared between a number of different ministries. The wetland freshwater sites and the agricultural areas are privately owned. The major portion of the wetland including reclaimed saltmarshes and abandoned salinas, belong to a single owner.
- (b) surrounding area : the agricultural areas around the wetland are privately owned.

**21. Current land use/principal human activities:**

- (a) site : agricultural land and traditional salt pans now largely abandoned. Salt marshes still used as pasture for cattle during summer months. Fish farms and shellfish plots are actively managed and their area has expanded in recent years.
- (b) surrounding/catchment : traditional agriculture (sheep and goat pasture, dry and irrigated orchards, market gardens). Low density residential areas spread over many areas around the wetland.

**22. Factors adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land use and development projects:**

- (a) at the site: the largest remaining patch of salt marsh now left in the Ria de Alvor is part of an area that was bought recently for tourist development. Other current threats to the estuary include dumping of dredged sand upon the existing dunes (important site for rare plant species); widespread use of four-wheel drive vehicles on the dune area; motorcycling on dry saltmarsh areas; excessive use of the lagoon for pleasure craft, including jet skis. Illegal hunting also occurs there, occasionally.

### **23. Conservation measures taken:**

Part of the Alvor area was declared as a “*Zona de Protecção da Natureza*” in the *Plano Regional do Ordenamento do Território do Algarve* or PROT, the Regional Management Plan of the Algarve. Part of the area is included in the National Ecological Reserve (*Reserva Ecológica Nacional*, REN).

### **24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:**

The Municipal Development Plan (PDM) specifies that the Ria de Alvor area should be classified as “*Area de Paisagem Protegida*” - a protected landscape area. The area was also proposed to the Natura 2000 network, under the EU Habitats directive (92/43/CEE).

A provisional management plan for the proposed Protected Area in the Ria de Alvor has been produced by the Algarve Working Group (GTA) of the Instituto da Conservação da Natureza.

### **25. Current scientific and research facilities:**

A local field station, operated by the ‘A ROCHA’ trust, was established in the area in 1985, to undertake monitoring studies of breeding, migrant and overwintering bird populations, plus botanic and entomologic studies. These facilities also operate as a local bird ringing station, coordinated with the national scheme (CEMPA) in Lisboa.

### **26. Current conservation education:**

The ‘A ROCHA’ visitor centre and field station provide facilities for school children (up to 1500 children have visited the site in 1996) and also produce books and informative leaflets for visitors. The centre has residential facilities for visiting researchers and for university students.

### **27. Current recreation and tourism:**

The lagoon and the estuarine - type habitats are regularly used by small boats and other powered pleasure vehicles. Two important centres of tourist activities - Lagos and Portimão, within a 7 km circle around the lagoon - lead to considerable pressure on the dunes, caused by visitors in the summer months. Dunes also suffer considerable degradation through uncontrolled roaming of four wheel drive vehicles. Recreational and commercial harvesting of shellfish (for human consumption and fishing bait) are also important activities in the area.

### **28. Jurisdiction:**

State jurisdiction (shared between national and regional agencies). Important competencies also held by the local municipalities.

### **29. Management authority:**

DRARN Algarve - Direcção Regional de Ambiente e Recursos Naturais do Algarve  
Rua Cândido Guerreiro,33, P-8000 FARO, Telef. : 089-803334; Fax: 089-803336

and

ICN/PNRF - Instituto da Conservação da Natureza/Parque Natural da Ria Formosa  
Quinta do Marim, Quelfes, P-8700 OLHÃO Telf.: 089-704134; Fax: 089-704165

### **30. Bibliographical references:**

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