

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

1. Country: Portugal

3. Ref: 7PT010

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5. Name of wetlands: Sapais de Castro Marim (Castro Marim saltmarshes)

7. Geographical coordinates: 37°12'N, 007°26'W

8. General location: Região Algarve/Vila Real de Santo António

9. Area: 2235 ha

10. Wetland type: F; G; H; 1; 5

11. Altitude: 44m (maximum); 1m (minimum)

12. Overview: The wetland is a complex system of creeks and natural salt marsh areas plus man-made salinas on the western side of the lower Guadiana. Strong saline influences are most obvious. Transformation of natural areas into salinas has been carried out many years ago.

13. Physical features: Complex of alluvial plains on the western bank of the lower Guadiana river. Natural wetland but vast areas were modified extensively over many years, essentially to benefit commercial production of salt using traditional method of water evaporation in salinas. Shallow waters with range of salinities strongly influenced by balance between freshwater inputs, penetration of salt water from the Ocean and evaporation. Wide tidal range in all areas open to the estuary. Climate essentially Mediterranean with a long hot and dry summer season.

14. Ecological features: Most habitats in the area denote strong saline influences and adaptation to the long hot and dry summer season. Open landscape and saltmarsh vegetation in areas of cyclic inondation by incoming tides. Low halophytic scrub in open dry areas around salinas. Dry farmland of distinctive Mediterranean type in the areas comparatively removed from saline influences.

15. Land tenure/ownership of: (a) site: Mostly private with many owners holding comparatively small plots.

(b) surrounding area: Mostly private.

16. Conservation measures taken: The area is a Nature Reserve under national law (Decreto-Lei no 162/75 from 27 March) and was further declared a Special Protection Area under Article 4 of the EC Wild Birds Directive (79/409).

17. Conservation measures proposed: The Nature Reserve has a management plan in preparation.

18. Current land use: (a) site: salt production; agriculture; fish-farming; tourism and recreation.

(b) surroundings/catchment: Agriculture, both traditional and intensive; tourism and recreation; fishing and hunting.

19. Disturbances/threats, including changes in land use and major development projects:

(a) at the site: Conversion of traditional salinas into commercial fish-farms; intensification of agriculture.

(b) in the surroundings/catchment: Indirect pressures coming from the expanding urban areas and road developments nearby. Risk of ecological change in the wetland areas associated to major hydrological interventions planned for the Guadiana river many kilometres upstream.

20. Hydrological and physical values: The wetland plays a crucial role in maintaining the balance of underground water tables in the area. It attenuates also the catastrophic consequences of occasional floods from the Guadiana and greatly helps retention of freshwater to one of the driest areas in Portugal, further suffering from marked irregular and torrential characteristics in the catchment zone.

21. Social and cultural values: The area holds outstanding social and cultural values and was a major salt production zone for many years. Historic settlements deeply relate to Roman and Arabic occupation many centuries ago and to a comparatively recent era of territorial dispute and stabilisation of the national borderline with Spain in the XVIII century.

22. Noteworthy fauna: The wetland has a very characteristic fauna and holds important concentrations of many species. Noteworthy breeding birds include: *Ciconia ciconia*, *Glareola pratincola*, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, *Recurvirostra avosetta*, *Himantopus himantopus*, *Sterna albifrons* and *Calandrella rufescens*. Since 1990 there is also a small heronry established in the area with 460 breeding pairs of *Bubulcus ibis* and 25 pairs of *Egretta garzetta* censused there in 1992. The wetland plays also a crucial role for many non-breeding flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber* and spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* originating mostly from Fuente de Piedra and similar areas in Andalucia (S. Spain). Migrating terns also turn up regularly there including *Sterna caspia*, *Gelochelidon nilotica* and *Chlidonias niger*.

23. Noteworthy flora: The wetland is noteworthy for its halophytic communities in the natural salt marsh areas. Also for its distinctive low shrubby vegetation well adapted to extremes of hot and dry climate and salty environment in the man-made areas around salinas. The agricultural areas have Mediterranean type vegetation with good examples of the Carob tree *Ceratonia siliqua* and wild dwarf palms *Chamaerops humilis* native to the region.

24. Scientific research and facilities: Basic monitoring activities currently carried out for a number of vertebrate species in the area. Virtually no research facilities available locally.

25. Conservation education: Information centre available for school groups and other visitors

coming to the area. There are also some observation posts for birds and other fauna within the Reserve.

26. Recreation and tourism: The area is regularly visited by many people interested in its unique landscape, archaeological values and characteristic flora and fauna.

27. Management authority: SNPRCN/Reserva Natural do Sapal de Castro Marim e Vila Real de Santo António, Castelo da Vila, 8950 Castro Marim, Portugal. Tel: +351 81 53 11 41 . Fax: +351 81 53 12 57.

28. Jurisdiction: State jurisdiction/Min. Environment

29. Bibliographical references: Farinha *et al.* 1991; Grimmett & Jones 1989; Rufino 1992; SNPRCN 1992.

30. Reasons for inclusion: The area stands for classification under criteria 1a and 1c; also under 2a, 2b and 2c; the area further qualifies under 3b and 3c.

31. Map of Site: enclosed.