**La Petite Camargue**

NATURAL RESOURCES AND WETLANDS

To the north-west of the Etang de Berre, to the south of the village of Saint-Chamas, there is a wetland area of more than 100 hectares

of more than 100 hectares: the Petite Camargue and the Palous.

From the meeting of the waters of the Touloubre river and the waters of the Etang de Berre is born

a marsh with landscapes, natural environments, rich and varied vegetation and fauna.

The paths open to the public that run through the site allow you to discover the variety of natural spaces, the diversity of landscapes and the

the variety of natural spaces, the diversity of landscapes and the exceptional richness of the fauna.

At the exit of the village of Saint-Chamas, after the Pont-Flavien, when the D10 road begins to

shore of the Etang de Berre, the main access to the site and the start of the trail are on the right below.

and the start of the track.

THE FRESHWATER MARSH

To the north of the track, the permanence of fresh water ensures the presence of reeds. This natural environment

This natural environment, known as the reed bed, is home to a range of animals adapted to the permanence of the water. Amongst

Among the many species of insects, the most remarkable are the dragonflies because of their size

their colours and their predatory habits. Female mosquitoes are noticeable for their itchy

of their bites. The insect manna feeds small palm warblers and their chicks

and their chicks, such as the rare and sedentary Whiskered Warbler or the Whip-poor-will and Turkey Warbler, present

or turd foxes, present during the summer months. Swallows feed on small flying insects

insects and sleep in groups in the reeds. At night, the bats take over the hunting of mosquitoes.

At night, bats take over the hunting of mosquitoes and moths.

Mute swans nest at the edge of the water, mallards and coots hide their nests near the water.

their nests close to the water. Coming from the reed bed, you can hear the calls of the water rail

from the reed bed. The water rail sounds like a pig grunting. The grey heron is a familiar sight on the site, as is the

the site, as is the little white heron, the little little egret. More discreet, the black-crowned night heron is

present in the summer months, as is the Purple Heron hidden in the reeds.

The Marsh Harrier, a large bird of prey, can be seen flying slowly over the vegetation in search of prey.

in search of prey.

Part of the reed bed is grazed by a few calves who maintain gaps in the vegetation that are favourable to birds.

vegetation that are favourable to birds.

Still from the track, swimming on the Etang de Berre, one can observe the gatherings of the

of the Black-necked Grebe in winter, the Great Crested Grebe at the end of the summer, Mute Swans or Flamingos.

flamingos.

MEDITERRANEAN RIVER

The track soon splits. On the left, it leads to the end of the deflector boom built with the

the hydroelectric power station to break the flow of water from the turbines. To the right, the track

leads you to a bridge over the Touloubre. This river has its source west of Aix en Provence

en Provence and crosses many gorges before flowing into the Etang de Berre. In

March, the muges go upstream in dense schools easy to observe. When you approach the

When you approach, the moorhen will hide under the brambles on the bank. The kingfisher, a bright blue flash, passes by

with a sharp whistle.

THE SANSOUÏRE AND THE LAGOON

After the bridge is a rare ecosystem: the sansouïre. This natural environment is made up of saltwort

and some other plants (soda, saladella), adapted to the high salt content of the soil and water.

soil and water. This type of environment is only found in coastal areas at sea level,

It is therefore very rare. The water body is shallow and salty and is a lagoon. Many birds feed here.

birds feed here, from the Greater Flamingo to small migratory waders, from the Bellon's Shelduck (large red-billed duck) to the

(large duck with a red bill) to the White Stilt.

The small size of the site and the human presence cause constant disturbance to the birds, which limits their

which limits the time they spend here. Several species of birds will be able to

Several species of birds will be able to nest here (Spring Wagtail, Avocet, Little Tern) once the disturbance has

will have decreased. It is therefore necessary to stay on the paths and to favour the one that runs along the river's edge.

the river.

From the bridge, you can access the mouth of the Touloubre and the shoreline, which is made up of shell debris, sedimentary mud and

of shellfish, sedimentary mud brought by the hydroelectric plant canal, and the waste of the

waste from the intense human activity around the Etang de Berre.

Going up the bank of the Touloubre, one soon arrives at the entrance to a humid wood. It is also possible

It is also possible to take a dead-end path on the right, to access the view of the bay of

Saint-Chamas. At the end of this path, a beautiful stretch of coastline separates the lagoon from the Etang. Here,

erosion is important, the shoreline has lost nearly 80 metres between 1950 and 2000. In order not to scare off the birds

To avoid frightening the birds present, it is not advisable to walk on this very attractive barrier beach.

THE RIPARIAN FOREST, WET FOREST

The trail passes through a humid wood, at first almost exclusively composed of ash and elm trees.

This lush wood is a real little European jungle. Underneath the large white poplars

protected plants: orchids, snake-tongue ferns and the rare wild vine.

the rare wild vine. The wood is home to green and spotted woodpeckers, orioles and black-crowned night herons.

Warblers and nightingales provide the musical atmosphere in spring. At the end of the

wood, the path leads to hay meadows irrigated by the water of the Durance diverted by

by canals from Lamanon. These meadows are grazed in spring and part of the summer by

ewes. You will find the road that leads to the Désesplan housing estate.

WALKING TIPS

A few simple rules are sufficient to walk without disturbing the fauna or damaging the sites

sites:

First, stay on the paths

Keep dogs on a lead

In the sansouïre, the Palous, be content to walk on the path near the Touloubre to avoid disturbing the birds.

to avoid disturbing the birds.

In autumn and winter, a few hunters visit the site. They are few in number and mostly confined to

They are few in number and mostly confined to the reed marshes. The hunting huts on the public maritime domain

are occupied on winter nights.

In every season, the Petite Camargue offers interesting landscapes. After heavy rains,

the paths are muddy and remain flooded. For birdwatching, spring is a good time: migratory birds

migratory birds or the first breeding birds can be seen. In autumn, the

In autumn, migrants from northern Europe also stop over. Early morning is a good time for observation.

The sun and mosquitoes can hinder the walk.

PRESENTATION TEXT

Acquired by the Conservatoire du Littoral in 1999 to ensure its definitive protection, a hundred hectares of the Petite Camargue is managed by the Conservatoire Etudes des Ecosystèmes

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of Provence - Southern Alps, as well as the communal property of Les Palous, with the help of

the Department and the Region.

THE SITE'S NATURAL HERITAGE IN FIGURES

From 1984 to 2004 :

217 species of birds observed (71 breeders, 16 winterers, 23 migrants, 6 regular sedentary

6 summering and 95 occasional)

31 species of dragonflies (3 threatened)

46 species of butterflies, including 1 protected species (the Diana)

10 rare and threatened plants

29 mammals, including 6 bat species, all protected

7 natural environments, 4 of which are rare and threatened in Europe

10 species of fish, including 1 vulnerable species (the Blennie Fluviatile)

7 reptiles, 3 amphibians, all protected