

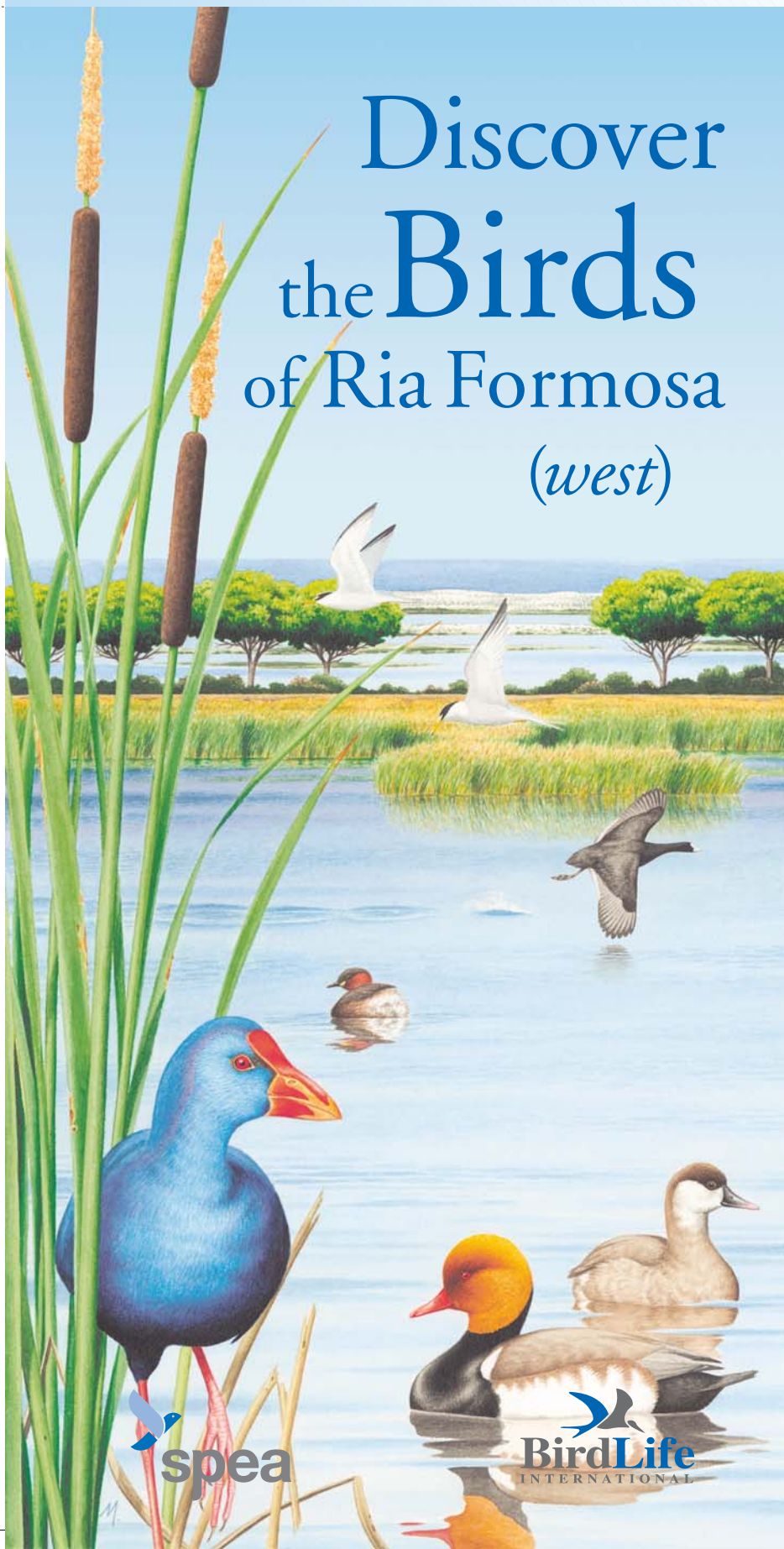


Faro is not just a destination for planes. But it is also on the migratory pathway of the Eastern Atlantic. Ria Formosa is visited by thousands of water-birds each year. With more than 30 000 birds this is the second most important wetland in Portugal for wintering water-birds.

The Ria Formosa Nature Park is a site of international importance:

- It is a breeding site for threatened species of birds.
- It is as well an important site as a wintering ground for many migratory birds coming from Northern Europe.
- It is an important stopover area during the migrations between Europe and Africa.

IN THE PATHWAY OF BIRD MIGRATIONS



ADEQUATE BEHAVIORS

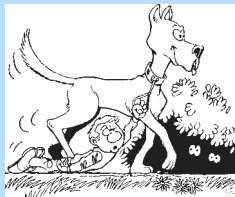
Visitors are more than welcome in the western sector of the park, however human pressure is quite considerable. This negative impact can be totally avoided if some simple guidelines are respected:



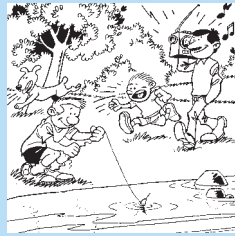
Please keep to the paths



Look at the plants but do not pick them, observe the animals and birds but do not disturb them



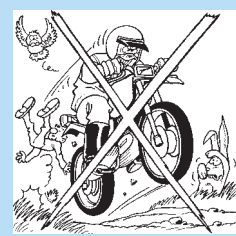
If you have a dog, please keep it on a lead.



Enjoy and respect the quietness of the Park



Do not leave any rubbish and take special care with cigarettes



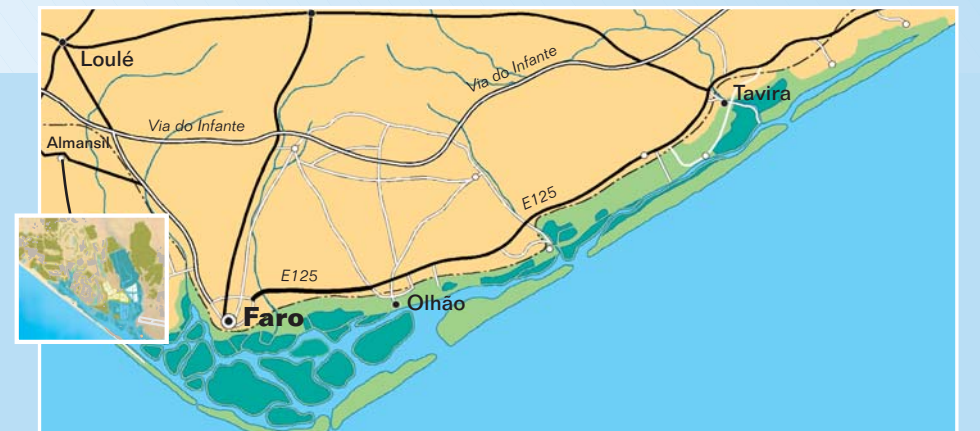
The Nature Park is not an area for motocross

RIA FORMOSA

The area covered by this map constitutes the western tip of the Ria Formosa Nature Park.

Ria Formosa is a wetland of 18,400 hectares formed by a spectacular 60 km long system of sand-dune islands – two peninsulas, five main islands and several stretches of salt-marsh. The area is vital for wildlife, especially for water-birds. Reflecting its international significance, Ria Formosa is included in the prestigious Ramsar Convention list of important wetlands. Furthermore, the 'Ria' has been declared as Special Protection Area under the European Union's law.

Portugal included the Ria Formosa in the list of Natura 2000 sites, this meaning that protection of their habitats is a priority when related to other interests such as agriculture, fishfarming, tourist or urban development.



To get to the Park there are two options:

- from east, following the signs to 'Ilha de Faro'
- from west, following the signs to 'Quinta do Lago'. From the main roundabout straight to the 6th roundabout and then go on to the parking lot (marked as 4 on the map).



- 1 Small pond outside from the boundaries of the Nature Park. Nevertheless it is important for some water-birds and should be protected.
- 2 This pond marks the beginning of the Nature Park. The water comes from a water treatment plant and keep this habitat alive and full of birds.
- 3 In this tide-less salt-water pond you can see close to the path some Little Egrets, Grey Herons, Cormorants and Black-winged Stilts.
- 4 From the wooden bridge, the longest in Europe for pedestrians, there is a magnificent view to the 'Ria'.
- 5 The wooden walk ways leading to the beach avoids walking on the dunes.
- 6 These artificial ponds, now abandoned, were built for fish-farming. From here one can get a nice view of the Ria.
- 7 This is one of the best sites for watching water-birds, especially Purple Swamp-Hens and Red-crested Pochards.
- 8 Close to this house one can enjoy an unique view of the marshes of the São Lourenço river.
- 9 These roman ruins are remnants of a fish salting station.
- 10 Easily accessible by car (from roundabout 5), this point is good for observing several nests of White Storks.
- 11 Ludo is located to the north of a complex of salt-pans, in the marshes of the São Lourenço river. It is the heart of the reserve and is private property, therefore access is restricted to the main path.
- 12 At Ludo: a good place to observe Herons and Cormorants roosting in the trees.
- 13 A good view over the salt-marshes of the Ria Formosa, this site is accessible by car from the airport.
- 14 The pinewoods of Pontal are one of the last coastal forest area in the Algarve, and an unique site for rare plants such as Tuberaria major.

Sea and sand-dunes

The deep coastal waters give way abruptly to a magnificent long sandy beach flanked by dunes along its entire extension. This extremely fragile habitat forms the border between the relentless Atlantic, the estuary and the lagoons. Walking or driving on the dunes will destroy this habitat as well as disturbing the colonies of Little Terns that use it during the breeding season.

Saltmarshes and lagoons

A complex maze of interconnected lagoons are continuously covered and uncovered by the rising and falling tide. Salt-loving plants adapted to this twice daily flooding bind the sand and mud banks. This habitat has a considerable diversity due to the variation of salinity and substrates. The estuarine environments are one of the richest and most productive of all ecosystems on Earth, a fact reflected in this area's abundant bird-life. Here we can see Whimbrels, Turnstones and Godwits.

The salt-pans

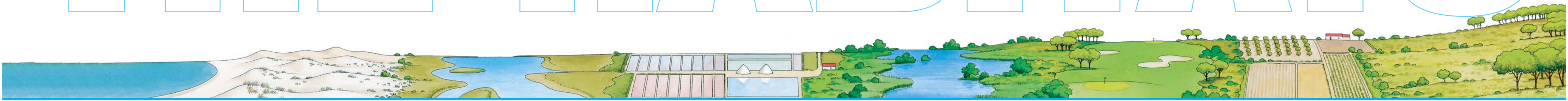
Originally salt-marshes, these large rectangular salt-pans ('salinas' in Portuguese) cover a considerable area, some still producing salt today. Although a man-made habitat, the unused salt-pans are a favourite feeding ground for wading birds, often in there thousands. The low water levels, even at high tide result in an irresistible attraction to birds like Avocets, Stilts, Godwits and Sandpipers, and many others, often escorted by a few hundred Greater Flamingoes.

Freshwater marshes and lakes

Most of the freshwater habitats are to be found at the final reaches of the river São Lourenço, where protected from the saline wetlands by a series of dykes. There is also a large freshwater lake within the adjacent golf course, Quinta do Lago, overlooked by a public observation hide. Along the borders, the vegetation consists of reed-beds, reed-mace and water-willows, so important for nesting water-birds, like the Purple Swamp-Hen.

Dry land

The wetlands give way to firm ground which, in the past, was occupied by Mediterranean type forest and scrub. The areas remaining intact are being lost to the construction of residential areas and golf courses. Nevertheless, within the limits of the protected area, large areas of Stone Pine woodland and its rich associated flora thrive, completing the unique diversity of habitats contained by the Ria Formosa Nature Park. It is a favourite site for Iberian Magpies and Hoopoes.



Little Tern *Sterna albitrons*

Breeds in the dunes and salt pans, usually in small colonies. It is the smallest of the terns occurring in Portugal and feeds on small fishes and crustaceans.



Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinans*

It is a resident and abundant seabird in Portugal. It feeds on fish and all sorts of wastes. While young it shows a brownish plumage.



Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Very common wintering bird in Portugal. Although named Black-headed, winter plumage show no dark head. It can also be seen following tractors in farms, profiting on the small invertebrates revolved by them.



Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Similar to the Cattle Egret, this bird can be seen only in wetlands where it captures small fishes. Often both species occur in the same roosts or breeding colonies. Resident.



Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Common and sometimes abundant wintering bird in the estuaries and coastal lagoons of the country. Ria Formosa is one of the few places where this species breeds in Portugal. It feeds in the mud, scanning food with peculiar movements of its bill.



Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

The smallest of all herons. Lives in reed-beds, where it can be seen flying over the reeds for their rides to the feeding areas. Summer visitor.



Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Sometimes a discrete bird, this bird can be found on almost every wetland with abundant vegetation. Resident.



White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Resident as well as migrant in Portugal, in not usual as breeder in the Algarve. During the winter it is a very common bird, walking around in the banks of the rivers or in the greens.



Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

A common seabird during the winter and migratory passage in the Portuguese coast, it can be seen also in estuaries. It dives into the water to catch fish.



Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Common during the winter, especially in the coast (sea and estuaries), but also occurs in inland areas. Juveniles are brownish and very difficult to distinguish from the juvenile Yellow-legged Gull.



Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

It is more abundant in the estuaries and coastal areas where it winters. Also occurs in reservoirs and inland rivers, it can be seen alone or in flocks. Feeds on fish.



Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

It is a fast flyer that can be seen flying just above the water. It fishes small fishes and crustaceans with a dive into the water. It is mainly a resident bird.



Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Wintering waders are abundant in the coastal areas, especially in estuaries and coastal lagoons. The salt pans or the salt marshes are often used for roosting and very large flocks can be seen there at dusk.



Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

So called because it often joins the cattle or even land on the back of cows and sheep. Breeds in large colonies and is a resident bird in Portugal.



Coot *Fulica atra*

Very common resident and winter visitor bird, found in wetlands with calm waters rich in vegetation. Can form large flocks.



Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Its flight and the rounded wings can recall an enormous butterfly. It is an unmistakable bird, with a very peculiar call. Resident in the Algarve.



Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Small wading bird, usually forming large and compact flocks. Winters in the estuaries and lagoons. During the winter the belly is white but becomes blackish when spring comes.



Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Wintering bird common on beaches and also in estuaries, where it can be seen in small flocks feeding on small invertebrates at low tide.



Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*

It can be seen in large numbers at the estuaries of Tejo and Sado, as well as at Ria Formosa and Castro Marim, especially during autumn and winter. Feeds on small invertebrates. Young birds are duller, not showing the bright pink tones of the adults.



Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Easily seen at the salt-pans all over the year, especially during the breeding season. Then it becomes quite noisy when someone disturbs the colony.



Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

It is a quite recent breeding bird at Ria Formosa, but it can be seen more frequently during winter and migration seasons. The peculiar shape of its bill can easily explain its name.



Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Easily recognised by its long and curved bill, it can be found in the coast during winter and migrations. During the spring it occurs also in woodlands and pastures.



Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Wintering duck forming large flocks. Ria Formosa is one of the best places in Portugal to watch this bird.



Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Resident bird, often increases in winter with the arrival of migratory birds. Feeds on fish and other small aquatic animals and can be seen in freshwater habitats.



Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*

Very common bird, usually watched in hedges, scrub and woodland. Females are brownish. Resident.



Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

The banks of the salt-pans are its favourite place to breed and raise the chicks. The eggs are very well disguised among the small stones of the banks. Resident.



Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Mainly wintering, but some pairs stay in Portugal to breed. It is the largest of the herons in Portugal, and can be found in all types of wetlands throughout the country.



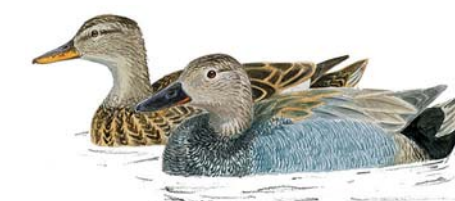
Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Not so common in Portugal, it can be found breeding in some places, like at Ria Formosa. Females are brownish. Feeds on aquatic plants.



Purple Swamp-hen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

This species was almost extinct in Portugal. Nowadays can be found in small ponds with reed-maces and reed-beds. Resident.



Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Mainly resident, its population is increased during the winter with the arrival of birds coming from Northern Europe.



White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Large and unmistakable. It breeds on buildings, and trees but also on coastal islets along the southwestern coast. Many stay during the winter. It can be found feeding in wetlands, rice-fields, pastures and garbage.



Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Summer visitor, the Bee-eaters dig their nests in sandy areas. It feeds on insects. Usually flies very high but can be seen when resting in trees and electric wires.



Sociedade Portuguesa
para o Estudo das Aves



WHY THIS MAP? – This map is produced by SPEA (BirdLife International's Partner Designate in Portugal) with support from other institutions. Its objective is to better inform the public, both residents and visitors, about this marvellous natural wildlife refuge, and how to enjoy it. The area covered by this guide is the western sector of the Ria Formosa, being a stronghold for the habitats and species responsible for the designation of the Nature Park and Natura 2000 site. Hopefully this publication will help nature-lovers everywhere enjoy and further understand the Ria Formosa.

This zone represents the western end of the Ria Formosa, is unique in bringing together in a small area most of the habitats and species most representative of the Natura2000 site. This provides to all nature lovers special pleasure, which is an additional motivation for this publication.

The Polis Litoral Ria Formosa, as part of its actions/intervention, promotes the reprinting of this edition, so that this information is distributed among the Ria Formosa's Natural Park general population and visitors.

Produced by: Sociedade Polis Litoral Ria Formosa – Sociedade para a Requalificação e Valorização da Ria Formosa, S.A. www.polislitoralriaformosa.pt; ICNB / Parque Natural da Ria Formosa, www.icnb.pt; SPEA – Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves, www.spea.pt; parceiro BirdLife International em Portugal; Almargem – Associação para a Defesa do Património Cultural e Ambiental do Algarve, www.almargem.org.

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