

## Contents

1. Territorial scope of the Action Plan .....	2
2. Relationship with the region.....	3
3. Population.....	4
4. Legal framework of the Protected Area .....	6
Applicable legal provisions .....	7
Environment .....	7
Tourism.....	9
5. Landscape, natural values and cultural heritage.....	9
Landscape .....	9
Economic activities.....	10
Flora and ecosystems.....	10
Fauna .....	11
Cultural heritage .....	11
6. Management and staff .....	12
7. Management of the park and its relationship with tourism .....	12
2005-2009 Management Plan.....	12
8. Annual number of visitors .....	13
9. Tourism structure.....	15
10. Tourism infrastructure and supply.....	18
Accommodation .....	18
Hotels.....	19
Rural tourism establishments .....	19
Campsites .....	19
Holiday apartments.....	19
Restaurants .....	19
Tourist activity companies.....	19
Gastronomy .....	20
Events .....	20
Public facilities .....	21

## 1. Territorial scope of the Action Plan

The Ebro Delta lies in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula and covers the area where the River Ebro flows out into the Mediterranean Sea. The River Ebro is the second largest river on the Iberian Peninsula after the River Duero, with a length of 930 km and a basin of 83,093 km<sup>2</sup>.



Covering an area of 320 km<sup>2</sup>, the Ebro Delta is the largest wetland in Catalonia and encompasses a wide array of environments: river, sea, bays, beaches, dunes, wetlands, riverine woodlands, coastal lagoons, river islands and springs all make up the natural environment and, along with the rice paddies, are home to a large number of organisms that have adapted to the different habitats.

The territorial scope of the action plan is the administrative area of El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park (PNDE), which is understood to be the area encompassed in the environmental protection terms: Natural Park and Plan for Areas of Natural Interest.

- **Natural Park.** The term applied to an area subject to environmental protection is **Natural Park**, in accordance with the protection categories established in **Law 4/1989**, of 27 March, on the conservation of natural areas and of wild flora and fauna. In 1983, the Government of Catalonia declared El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park to be a protected area and expanded it in 1986 through the declaration of the **partial nature reserves of La Punta de la Banya and Sapinya Island**



- **Plan for Areas of Natural Interest.** In addition to the area included in the Natural Park, there is a proportion of the territory included in the Plan for Areas of Natural Interest, which was approved in Decree 328/1992, of 14 December, covering the areas of the Natura 2000 Network and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

The **protected area** in El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park covers 7,802 hectares. When this is added to the territory included in the Plan for Areas of Natural Interest, the total rises to 11,007 hectares, of which 10,443 are land (including 2,578 ha of natural reserves) and 564 are sea.

## 2. Relationship with the region

El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park is located at the southernmost point of Catalonia and covers land in two different administrative regions: 5,540 ha in El Montsià (the right half of the delta) and 2,262 ha in El Baix Ebre (the left half of the delta). El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park protects land in five towns: Amposta, Deltebre, L'Ampolla, Sant Carles de la Ràpita, and Sant Jaume d'Enveja.

The protected area of El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park (7,802 ha) forms part of a broader geographical unit: the Ebro Delta, which has a surface area of some 32,000 ha. The scope of application of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas includes the seven towns that belong to the delta plain: Amposta, Camarles, Deltebre, L'Aldea, L'Ampolla, Sant Carles de la Ràpita and Sant Jaume d'Enveja. The territorial extent of the towns included in the scope of the ECST of the Ebro Delta is 45,356 ha. (Table 1)

Town	Total surface area (ha)	Protected area (ha)	%
Amposta	13,765	1,256.3	16
Camarles	2,980	0	0
Deltebre	10,348	1,868.74	24
L'Aldea	3,018	0	0
L'Ampolla	3,567	392.74	5
Sant Carles de la Ràpita	5,323	2,753.53	35
Sant Jaume d'Enveja	6,355	1530.52	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45,356</b>	<b>7,801.83</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 1.** Surface area of the towns that form part of El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park. Source: National Statistics Institute (INE), 2007 (municipal census as of 1 January 2005 and National Geographic Institute [IGN]), and El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park, 2007

The table above shows that the town with the largest protected area in the park is Sant Carles de la Ràpita with 35%, followed by Deltebre with 24%. The town with the smallest protected area is L'Ampolla with 5%, and Camarles and L'Aldea are the two Ebro Delta towns that have no protected hectares in the Natural Park.

The territory's degree of complexity must be considered based on aspects like the following:

- The administrative structure of the territory. The seven towns are located in two regions, which are geographically delimited by the River Ebro: the delta space to the north of the river belongs to El Baix Ebre, and the delta space to the south of the river lies in El Montsià. Each one is governed by its corresponding administration: El Baix Ebre Regional Council and El Montsià Regional Council.
- The provincial, regional and local administrative structures with tourism responsibilities: the Directorate-General for Tourism of the Government of Catalonia's Ministry of Innovation, Universities and Enterprise; Tarragona Provincial Council Tourist Board (Terres de l'Ebre); the Ministry of Territorial Policy and Public Works' Institute for the Development of the Ebro Region; the Consortium for the Execution of Les Terres de l'Ebre Tourism Revitalisation Plan; the regional councils of El Montsià and El Baix Ebre; municipal tourist boards; and town councils with tourism departments corresponding to the area.
- The public and private organisations directly or indirectly involved in the ownership, management or use of fresh water from the River Ebro, a vital resource for the maintenance of the current anthropogenic ecosystem of the delta: Right Half of the Ebro Delta Irrigation Community, Left Half of the Ebro Delta Irrigation Community, El Montsià Rice Growers Cooperative, and Ebro Delta Rice Growers Cooperative. It should be taken into account that, due to its location, the park's land is nourished by excess water from the rice paddy fields that precede it along the course of the river.
- The public and private organisations directly or indirectly involved in the ownership, management or use of the coasts and marine waters: the Ministry of the Environment with the Directorate-General for Coasts; the Ministry of Development with the Directorate-General for the Merchant Navy; and fishermen's and shellfish catchers' guilds.
- The diversity of tourism supply and demand in the seven towns: conventional beach tourism; cruises along the River Ebro and fishing centres; active tourism with a range of cycling, hiking, canoeing, kite surfing and other options; rural tourism with a wide range of rural accommodation; and an incipient but promising range of ornithological tourism options.

### 3. Population

The current population of the Ebro Delta is 56,588 inhabitants, distributed into the towns cited in Table 2. Amposta is the most populous town in the Ebro Delta, concentrating 33.83% of the delta's population (Chart 1), followed by the towns of Sant Carles de la Ràpita and Deltebre, both with a population of more than 10,000 inhabitants. These three towns account for more than 75% of the population of the Ebro Delta. The four other towns (Camarles,

L'Aldea, L'Ampolla and Sant Jaume d'Enveja) each have a population of more than 2,500 inhabitants.

Town	Population	Percentage
Amposta	19,142	33.83
Camarles	3,371	5.96
Deltebre	10,811	19.10
L'Aldea	3,795	6.71
L'Ampolla	2,613	4.62
Sant Carles de la Ràpita	13,488	23.83
Sant Jaume d'Enveja	3,368	5.95
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56,588</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2. Population of each one of the towns in the Natural Park. Source: National Statistics Institute (INE), 2007 (data from the municipal census as of 1 January 2006)

Amposta is the capital of the region of El Montsià and also includes the small town of El Poble Nou del Delta, which has approximately 300 inhabitants, in addition to the Eucaliptus housing development, whose very small population percentage significantly increases in the summer season. The town of Deltebre is home to a similarly sized housing development called Riumar. Sant Carles de la Ràpita meets the definition of a beach town.

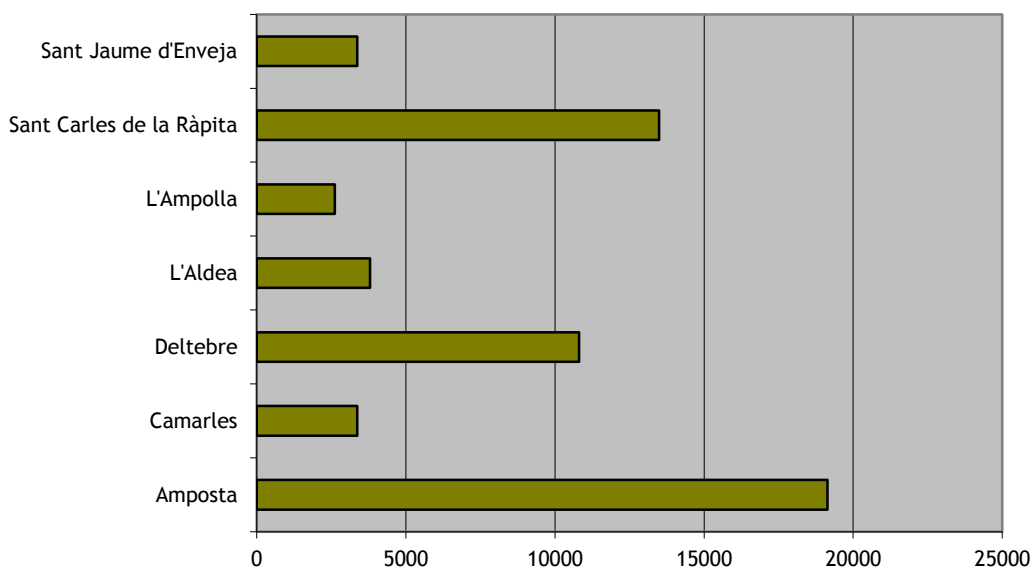


Chart 1. Population development. Source: National Statistics Institute (INE), 2007 (data from the municipal census as of 1 January 2006)

In the last nine years the population of the Ebro Delta has shown a rising trend that is similar to the rate of Catalonia as a whole and slightly higher than the rate of the province of Tarragona (Chart 2). If the various towns are compared, it is evident that the population increase from 1996 to 2006 was much more pronounced in Amposta (3,242 inhabitants more than in 1996) and in Sant Carles de la Ràpita (2,660 inhabitants more) than in the rest of the towns. The town that has shown least growth in its population is Sant Jaume d'Enveja.

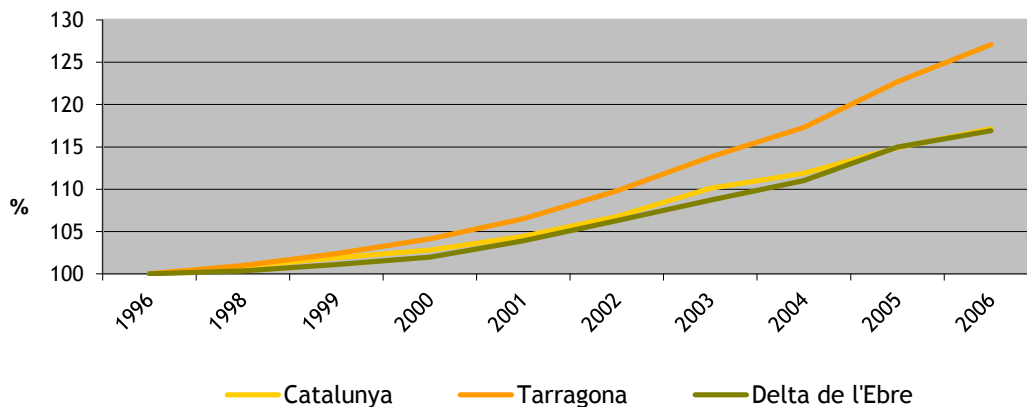


Chart 2. Population development (1996-2006). Source: National Statistics Institute (INE), 2007 (data from the municipal census as of 1 January 2006)

#### 4. Legal framework of the Protected Area

El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park was declared as such in 1983 through Decree 357/1983, of 4 August, on the declaration of El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park. It was extended in 1986 through Decree 332/1986, of 23 October, on the declaration of El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park and of the partial nature reserves of La Punta de la Banyà and Sapinya Island.

According to Law 12/1985, of 13 June, on natural areas, protected natural areas in Catalonia are covered by two types of regulatory instruments in terms of their zoning and management.

- The objective of the **Special Environmental and Landscape Protection Plans** is to define the main actions to conserve natural heritage and achieve sustainable development in the area, including general zoning rules and regulations (urban development, exploitation of natural resources, etc.). That is, it is a transversal planning instrument.

- The second instrument is the **Plan Governing Use and Management (PRUG)**, covering mid-term management actions in the protected natural area, in accordance with the Special Protection Plan.

El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park does not yet have its own special environmental and landscape protection plan or a plan governing use and management. So far, the park has managed its protected area by means of declaration decrees, annual action programmes approved by its governing board, and a management plan (in the period from 2005 to 2009).

The preparation of a Special Environmental and Landscape Protection Plan for El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park is a highly complex process, given that the area is currently used for a number of purposes (tourism, hunting, fishing, etc.) that depend on a large number of public and private socioeconomic organisations.

### Applicable legal provisions

#### *Environment*

- Council Directive 79/409/EEC, of 2 April 1979, on the conservation of wild birds.
- Resolution of 15 March 1993, including it on the list of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat.
- Law 4/1989, of 27 March, on the conservation of natural areas and of wild flora and fauna. Amended by Law 41/1997, of 5 November, on the conservation of protected areas and of wild flora and fauna.
- Law 12/1985, of 13 June, on natural areas. It was adapted by Legislative Decree 11/1994, of 26 July.
- Decree 328/1992, of 14 December, approving the Plan for Areas of Natural Interest. Amended by Decree 213/1997, Decree 20/2000 and Decree 226/2001.
- Law 3/1988, on the protection of animals, and subsequent amendments and extensions.
- Urban Planning Master Plan of the Coastal System.
- Les Terres de l'Ebre Territorial Plan.
- Decree 269/1996, of 23 July, regulating the approval of the change of name and the amendment of the surface area of L'Encanyissada Game Reserve and the expansion of El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park.
- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 30 October 1989, on the declaration of El Garxal Wildlife Shelter.
- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 3 January 1991, on the declaration of El Canal Vell Wildlife Nature Reserve and Biological Station.
- Decree 148/1992, of 9 June, regulating photographic, scientific and sporting activities that may affect wildlife species.

- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 7 July 1992, on the declaration of La Punta del Fangar Wildlife Nature Reserve.
- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 9 September 1992, on the declaration of La Tancada Reservoir Wildlife Nature Reserve.
- Resolution of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 28 October 1992, declaring as a safety area, in accordance with the Hunting Law, the beaches of the southern half of the delta in the towns of Amposta, Sant Carles de la Ràpita and Sant Jaume d'Enveja.
- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 9 June 1993, declaring areas for the production of molluscs and other marine invertebrates on the Catalan coast.
- Resolution of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 18 October 1993, regulating hunting and fishing in the segregated lands of the private hunting area of Buda Island in El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park.
- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 14 February 1994, on the declaration as a natural wildlife reserve of the southern part of Buda Island and Els Calaixos Lagoons.
- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 13 June 1994, establishing a plan for the farming of the natural bank of clams (*Donax sp.*) in Sant Carles de la Ràpita.
- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 31 July 1995, declaring Sant Antoni Island as a natural wildlife reserve.
- Decree 84/1997, of 1 April, on the management of the economic autonomy system of special protection areas attached to the Ministry of the Environment.
- Law 9/1995, of 27 July, on the regulation of motorised access to the natural environment. Developed by Decree 166/1998, of 8 July.
- Decree 166/1998, of 8 July, on the regulation of motorised access to the natural environment.
- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 20 May 1999, on the establishment of a system of aid to foster agricultural production methods in the wetlands included on the Ramsar Convention list.
- Order of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, of 30 July 1999, regulating eel fishing in the Ebro Delta.
- Resolution MAB/2307/2003, of 21 July, establishing hunting species, hunting seasons and closed seasons for 2003-2004 throughout Catalonia.
- Resolution MAH/498/2004, of 1 March, establishing the species that can be fished, fishing seasons, and the waters in which they can be fished during the corresponding fishing seasons in the continental waters of Catalonia for 2004.



## Tourism

- Law 13/2002, of 21 June, on tourism in Catalonia.
- Decree 214/95, of 27 June, regulating residential-farmhouse tourism.
- Decree 313/2006, of 26 July, regulating rural tourism establishments.
- Decree 81/1991, of 25 March, establishing the requirements to be met by companies that organise sports and leisure activities and adventure tourism.
- Order of 10 April 1991, regulating sporting and leisure activities and adventure tourism.
- Decree 56/2003, of 20 February, regulating sporting activities in the natural environment.
- Decree 167/1985, of 23 May, determining the campsite authorisation procedure.

## 5. Landscape, natural values and cultural heritage

### Landscape

The Ebro Delta is one of the most important coastal phenomena on the Iberian Peninsula. The surface area of the delta is currently some 32,000 ha and it constitutes one of the most important wetland areas in the Mediterranean.

The morphology of the delta has changed over time due to the interaction of the river with the coast. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the delta's morphology has been relatively characterised by a process of stabilisation, mainly due to the hydrological changes made to the basin by man. The development of the delta in the last century was determined by two events: the opening in 1937 of a new mouth (La Sorrapa Inlet) and an increase in the number of reservoirs in the Ebro Basin, which retain almost 95% of the river's sediment.

The landscape of the delta has a powerful personality; the totally flat terrain gives it a unique appearance. The vast rice paddies, which change according to the seasons (earthy in winter, flooded with water in spring, bright green in summer) dominate the physiognomy of the delta. Along the coast you will find one of the most attractive landscapes in the Mediterranean: extensive lagoons surrounded by reed swamps and rush communities, bordered by huge swathes of salt marshes and wetlands and long, deserted beaches backed by dunes crowned with cordgrass and other plants that are well suited to this environment.

The Ebro Delta is home to a diversity of aquatic environments. The delicate balances established between its marine and continental waters both on the surface and underground are mainly responsible for them.

## Economic activities

As it is a protected area located within inhabited areas, it is subject to complex relationships between the quest for conservation and the various economic activities that are carried out there. Moreover, much of its biodiversity is actually based on the existence of long-term human activities.

The transformation, caused by man, of the wetlands and of the original salt marshes, started in the late nineteenth century with the introduction of rice cultivation. The natural environments in the delta currently occupy 8,000 ha, while rice farming occupies some 20,000 ha.

The area's agriculture is based, therefore, on rice growing, which thanks to its need for permanent flooding has transformed the area into an extremely important habitat for many waterfowl species. The transformation engendered by the cultivation of rice in the delta is not limited solely to strictly agricultural land. The irrigation infrastructure required by this crop and interconnection with contiguous habitats have had a direct influence on natural areas, affecting their various ecosystems. The hydrological system of the coastal lagoons used to be marked by periods of abundant fresh water and periods of hypersalinity during much of the year. Following the transformation of the delta into rice paddies, the process reversed and the saline concentration of the lagoons diminished, gradually changing the composition of the plant life and therefore its ecosystems.

## Flora and ecosystems

The delta's plant life species are as different as the environments to which they have been forced to adapt: salt or fresh water environments, land that is flooded to a greater or lesser degree, and dunes under the influence of marine currents and winds. The ecosystems present in the Ebro Delta are as follows:

- **River:** the Ebro is the central element. The distribution of riverine woodlands is defined by the influence of salinity. This environment has been extensively transformed by orchards, rice paddies and the towpath.
- **Lagoons:** environments connected to the sea and surrounded by rice paddies. They are characterised by their high diversity of fish species and high concentration of waterfowl.
- **Beaches and dunes:** environments subject to great variability, which in some cases has not allowed any plant life to take root. The fauna to which these environments play host is extremely varied.
- **Wetlands and salt marshes:** environments under marine influence. These areas are home to halophytes, one of the most threatened plant life groups in Europe.

- **Natural pools:** fresh water pools that rise up in peat bogs. They are located between the border of the delta plain and the mainland. They are home to highly specific flora and a wide diversity of fish species.
- **Rice paddies:** the dominant environment of the delta's physiognomy.

## Fauna

The delta's fauna is mainly known for its spectacular presence of waterfowl in both the mating and winter seasons. This abundance of waterfowl has traditionally generated major interest amongst hunters, especially of ducks and coots. The biological wealth of the waters has favoured the presence of valuable species of fish, molluscs and crustaceans, which has led to the area's significant fishing activity. The Ebro Delta is of international importance for eight species of plants and sixty-nine species of vertebrates, mostly birds.

## Cultural heritage

The Ebro Delta, due to its ecological and geological characteristics, has always constituted a rather hostile environment. This is reflected in its relative dearth of historical heritage. In the area that covers the scope of the park and the area included in the Plan for Areas of Natural Interest, this has been accentuated and historical traces have often been buried by the natural processes of sedimentation, erosion and subsidence. Despite this, some constructions, objects and customs that have helped to understand the development of this space over the last few hundred years have been conserved:

- **Irrigation network:** the failed construction of a navigation canal on the right bank of the Ebro was key to the start of the cultivation of rice. In the twentieth century the expansion of this crop led to the consolidation of an irrigation system throughout the delta.
- **Watchtowers (twelfth to nineteenth centuries):** they can be found along the entire delta plain. In some areas these towers have barely managed to survive the ravages of time, and, of the three known to have existed, only the one dedicated to Saint John has survived. However, along the old coastline, at Camarles and L'Aldea, there are still some watchtowers from the same period.
- **Salt marshes:** one of the first uses made of the delta was salt extraction. The park contains La Trinitat Salt Marshes, at La Punta de la Banya, and Sant Antoni Salt Marshes, at La Tancada, which were the first to enter into production.
- **Traditional fishing methods:** L'Encanyissada Lagoon conserves Catalonia's oldest professional fishing method, hoop nets, which dates back to the middle ages.
- **Lighthouses:** the fact that it was very difficult to access the natural ports of El Fangar and Els Alfacs meant that this area was one of the points that most need illumination. Three lighthouses were constructed: on Buda Island, at La Punta de la

Banya and at La Punta del Fangar, which were selected because they are the most representative geographic points delimiting the lands of the delta.

## 6. Management and staff

The staff of El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park is made up of 30 full-time employees (five administration clerks, seven technicians and eighteen members of the maintenance crew), in addition to a variable number of external staff:

- Employment plans are used to temporarily contract eight or nine people for half the year (one technician, the rest skilled workers).
- The public company Forestal Catalana employs a further eight to ten workers.

The Ministry of Environmental Education, Dissemination and Public Use should also be mentioned as it employs two public use technicians and an administration clerk.

## 7. Management of the park and its relationship with tourism

### 2005-2009 Management Plan

As stated above, the preparation of a **Special Environmental and Landscape Protection Plan** in El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park is highly complex due to its current uses (tourism, hunting, fishing, etc.) and the large number of public and private socioeconomic organisations involved.

The park opted to prepare a preliminary document to serve as a base for regulatory planning, in which it set out its mid- and long-term **objectives and management guidelines**.

The management plan includes the following **sections**: general information, environment and natural heritage, heritage value assessment, zoning, long-term objectives, factors that can affect management, definition of mid-term actions and objectives, actions, and annexes.

The **strategic objectives** of the management plan for the area are as follows:

- Conserve and improve **habitats of interest** in the Ebro Delta.
- Conserve and improve **species of interest** in the Ebro Delta.
- Guarantee the **infrastructure** that is intrinsically necessary for the **conservation** of natural heritage.
- Improve the natural appearance of the **landscape**.
- Foster scientific **research**.

- Establish the **relational framework** for all the **public and private bodies** acting in the Ebro Delta.
- Adapt, monitor and improve the **legislative scope**.
- Foster **public use** in a rational manner that respects the conservation of the natural area.
- Foster **environmental education**.
- Disseminate **natural and cultural heritage**.
- Foster **public participation** in the park's activities.
- Contribute to the **sustainable socioeconomic development** of the local population.

## 8. Annual number of visitors

The data analysed with respect to the number of visitors to the natural park are based on figures from tourist information offices in the towns in the delta and the park's information centres.

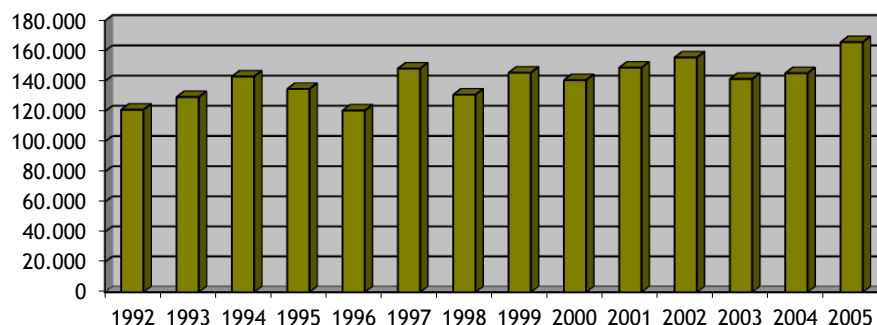


Chart 3. Development of the number of visitors. Source: Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park

There has not been a clear increase or reduction in the number of visitors to the Ebro Delta (Chart 3). It can be seen that there is an initial increase from 1992 (121,237 visitors) to 1994 (143,209), and that it was possibly truncated due to the opening of the Port Aventura theme park in Salou in 1995, just 80 km from El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park. Due to the appearance of this new destination, 1996 registered the least number of visitors, 120,700. Some years later, the situation normalised, experiencing fewer extreme rises and falls. From 2003 to 2005 there was a gradual increase, reaching its zenith in 2005 with 165,950 visitors.

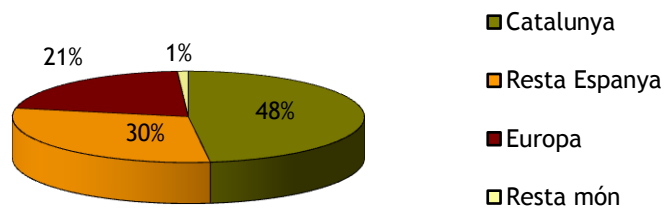


Chart 4. Source of the visitors. Source: Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park

Almost half of the visitors to the park are from Catalonia (Chart 4). Taking into account the number of people who visit the area from other autonomous communities, domestic tourism accounts for more than 75% of all visitors. However, the percentage of foreign tourists to the park should not be dismissed, given that it represents 22% of the total.

With regard to **domestic tourism**, after Catalonia, the regions from which the highest number of tourists come are the **Valencian Community (25%)**, Aragón (20%) and Madrid (18%).

In the case of foreign tourism, the majority hail from France, with 56% of the total, followed by Germany (15%) and the United Kingdom (7%). Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy and other nations account for 22%.

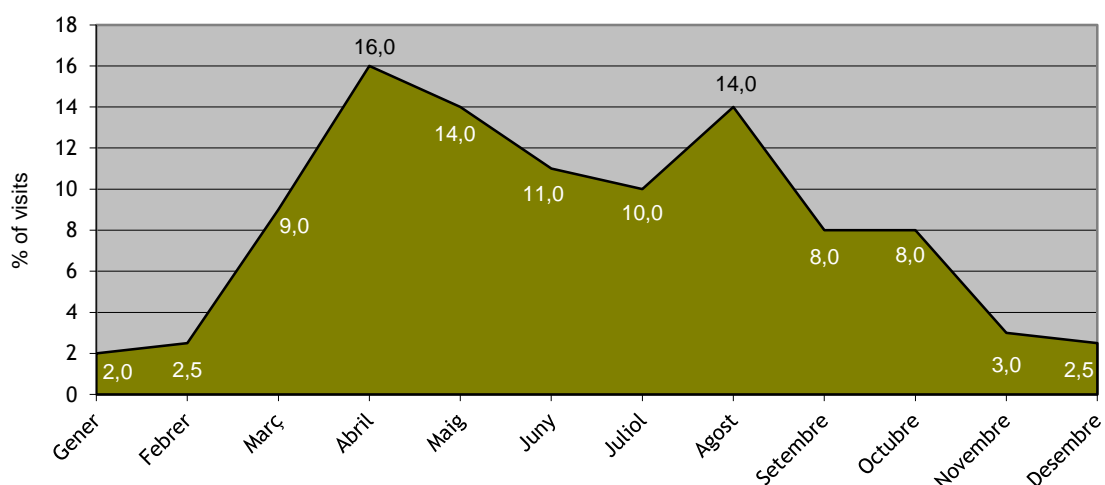


Chart 5. Tourism seasonality. Source: data from the Ecomuseum of El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park

Visits to the Ebro Delta are not particularly subject to seasonality (Chart 5): in the winter months there is a considerable decrease, but from March to October there is an increase in the number of visits. There are three significant peaks, corresponding to the months of April, May and August. The number of visitors to the delta at Easter is high, which is why April

registers the maximum number of visitors. The peak in May is because spring is one of the best times for birdwatching. The August peak coincides with the summer holidays.

According to data from the Ministry of Environment and Housing of the Government of Catalonia, El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park welcomed 855,000 visitors in 2004.

## 9. Tourism structure

Tourism is a relatively recent arrival in the Ebro Delta. Although in the 1960s and 1970s attempts were made to foster tourism in a similar fashion to how it was being promoted along the rest of the coast, the same results could not be achieved due to a lack of infrastructure and services and also due to the annoying presence of insects and other negative factors. This led to the failure of the tourism project started at the Riumar and Eucaliptus developments. In the 1980s, the declaration of El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park included a campaign to publicise the area's natural, landscape and traditional values and demand was created in this sector.

The efforts made by local administrations in the creation and improvement of infrastructure and by local private initiatives in the generation of stable tourism accommodation (hotels, farmhouses, restaurants, campsites, etc.), in addition to the implementation of recreational activities (bike rental, horse rides, boat trips along the river, specialist guides, etc.) have configured an alternative to traditional coastal tourism. It is based on the ecotourism model and presents the Ebro Delta as a destination in which you can enjoy the area's landscapes, flora and fauna, gastronomy, traditions and culture.

It is important to highlight the park's role as a driver of this change through the creation of public facilities in the periphery of natural areas and in urban centres. The result of this effort can be seen in the increase in the number of visitors: rising from 15,000 in 1983 to almost 130,000 in just ten years (Chart 6).

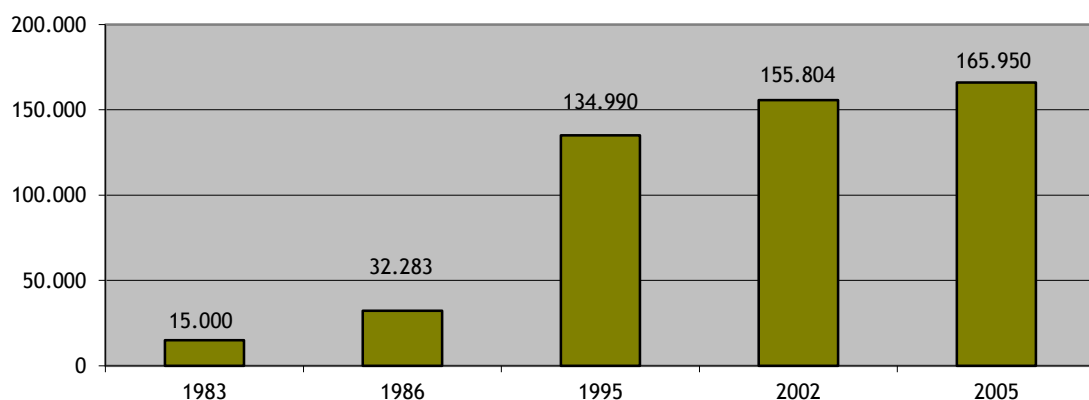


Chart 6. Development of the number of visitors, 1986-2005. Source: Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park

Tourism in the Ebro Delta has been following a rising trend (Chart 7) and the segment that has shown the greatest increase is rural accommodation, which has risen from no establishments at all in 1986 to 34 in 2003. The increase is less pronounced in the case of companies offering activities beyond accommodation. The most positive growth was in the bike rental, increasing from zero companies in 1986 to seven in 2003. The presence of adventure sports companies is still limited, standing at just two in 2003. Horse riding enjoyed a boom in 1995, but by 2003 these companies no longer existed.

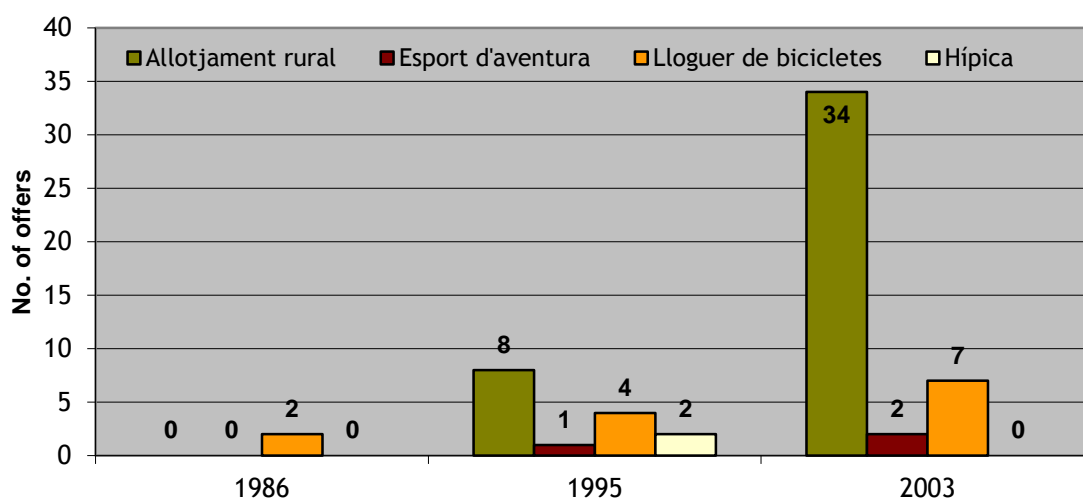


Chart 7. Tourism development, 1986-2003. Source: Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park

In the second half of the twentieth century the river lost its commercial value as a means of transport, but its leisure use increased, mainly due to boat rides for tourists and recreational fishing. Tourism has consolidated a position as a new economic sector, mainly thanks to the interested generated by El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park. Tourism services and activities are currently tending towards an ecotourism model whose main attractions are the possibilities offered by the area's natural and cultural resources. Some 56,000 inhabitants live in the delta's seven towns. This degree of human encroachment has led to intense economic and social activity that, taken together, is significantly based on the use of natural resources. This has generated a symbiotic relationship between natural and human elements that has marked the delta's evolution. Tourism represents a new, environmentally friendly economic alternative. However, there are also other activities associated with it, such as quads, horse riding, motocross, all-terrain vehicles, and generally a high frequency of visitors, which could pose a threat to the conservation of some areas of the park.

In the late 1990s the idea that the expansion of tourism in previous decades had led to a growing environmental impact was accepted, making it necessary to carefully plan and foster an ecotourism model as an alternative to the growth of classic beach tourism. The construction of the Riumar and Eucaliptus developments in the 1960s destroyed large tracts



of dunes and marshes with high ecological value. The attempt in 1988 to build a massive Eucalyptus II development for 10,000 people at Erms de la Tancada was aborted thanks to the efforts of conservationist groups.

Currently, agricultural activity, despite being the key to the formation and continuation of the delta's principal environmental values, is no longer the main economic activity. Other activities like aquaculture (especially in the bays) and tertiary sector activities (above all tourism) already exceed agriculture's contribution to the Ebro Delta's GDP and employment.

Tourism based on experiencing the area and using its natural and cultural resources in a sustainable manner presents significant potential and El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park is a large part of why these tourists are attracted to the delta.

The Action Plan of the Comprehensive Ebro Delta Protection Plan will be based on five areas of intervention, including the **promotion of experience tourism** (rural tourism, cultural tourism, etc.).

The base document of the Comprehensive Ebro Delta Protection Plan, drafted in July 2006, includes the need to follow the guidelines and recommendations of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, which is in the process of being adopted by the local administrations and the park.

Currently, the bodies with the most direct effect on the planning of tourism in the Ebro Delta are numerous and represent a complex web of interrelations:

- The Ministry of Innovation, Universities and Enterprise through the Territorial Innovation, Universities and Enterprise Services and the Directorate-General for Tourism
- The Ministry of Territory and Sustainability through the Territorial Environmental Services in Terres de l'Ebre and the Parks Service
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Action through the Territorial Agricultural, Food and Rural Action Services in Les Terres de l'Ebre
- Commission for the Sustainability of the Delta. Comprehensive Ebro Delta Protection Plan (PIPDE)
- Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park
- Secretary-General for Tourism. Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Trade
- Tarragona Provincial Council Tourist Board (Les Terres de l'Ebre)
- The Institute for the Development of the Ebro Region (IDECE) from the Ministry of Territorial Policy and Public Works
- The Consortium for the Execution of Les Terres de l'Ebre Tourism Revitalisation Plan
- The regional councils of El Montsià and El Baix Ebre

- Consortium of Agro-environmental Services of the Regions of El Baix Ebre and El Montsià (CODE)
- Lidebre Consortium LEADER Group
- Municipal tourist boards
- Town councils

In addition to the above institutions there are also private not-for-profit institutions that intervene in the planning and management of tourism, business associations, and conservationist, volunteer and environmental education groups.

Finally, private companies also form a mosaic of organisations that carry out actions that directly influence tourism in the Ebro Delta.

## 10. Tourism infrastructure and supply

### Accommodation

The table below shows information compiled about the tourist accommodation infrastructure in El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park, according to data from the Tourism Register of Catalonia from 2006. It contains information about both the number of establishments and the total number of beds.

TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE								
El Baix Ebre	Hotel accommodation		Rural tourism		Apartments		Campsite	
Town	No.	Beds	No.	Beds	Companies	No.	No.	Beds
L'Aldea	2	70	1	15	-	-	-	-
L'Ampolla	4	107	1	4	-	-	4	1,286
Deltebre	6	226	19	101	1	3	2	1,148
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2,434</b>
El Montsià	Hotel accommodation		Rural tourism		Apartments		Campsite	
Town	No.	Beds	No.	Beds	Business	No.	No.	Beds
Amposta	4	198	13	124	1	6	3	930
Sant Carles de la Ràpita	12	977	1	9	2	28	-	-
Sant Jaume d'Enveja	1	10	4	29	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1,185</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>930</b>
<b>Ebro Delta TOTAL</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>1,588</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3,364</b>

Table X. Tourism infrastructure in El Delta de l'Ebre Natural Park. Source: Tourism Register of Catalonia, 2006. Les Terres de l'Ebre Strategic Plan

The coastal area of El Montsià presents a significant concentration with 1,252 beds in Amposta and 986 in Sant Carles de la Ràpita. Deltebre stands out in the region of El Baix Ebre with 1,475. In both El Baix Ebre and El Montsià the highest percentage of accommodation corresponds to the campsite segment.

## *Hotels*

With respect to the distribution of hotels by town, it should be stated that not many towns concentrate more than five hotels. In Sant Carles de la Ràpita there is a total of twelve, and in Deltebre there are six. The town that concentrates the most hotel beds is Sant Carles de la Ràpita, with 977. In the regions of El Baix Ebre and El Montsià the distribution of hotel beds per category is even more pronounced than the majority, between 2- and 3-star establishments.

## *Rural tourism establishments*

Although it is true that hotels and campsites are the two types of accommodation that contribute the highest proportion of beds, rural tourism offers the largest number of establishments: a total of 58 in the two regions. The towns that concentrate more than five rural establishments are Deltebre, with 19, and Amposta, with 13. Independent rural accommodation is the commonest type in both regions.

## *Campsites*

In the region of El Baix Ebre there are six campsites, four in the town of L'Ampolla and two in Deltebre, whereas in the region of El Montsià there are three, all in the town of Amposta.

## *Holiday apartments*

Sant Carles de la Ràpita, with 28, is the town with the highest number of holiday apartments, which are rented out by two companies. Throughout the Ebro Delta there are 37 holiday apartments rented out by four companies.

## *Restaurants*

In the municipal scope, restaurants are highly concentrated in the coastal towns, such as Deltebre and Sant Carles de la Ràpita.

## *Tourist activity companies*

There is a significant concentration of tourist activity and service companies in Amposta (10), followed by Deltebre (6) and Sant Carles de la Ràpita (4).

The tourist activity companies in the territory offer: fishing, cruises, horse riding, environmental education and interpretation, bird watching, bike rental, water sports (wake boarding, kite surfing and kayaking), hiking, and traditional Ebro Delta cultural activities.

## Gastronomy

In addition to tourism infrastructure per se, one of the other attractions of the area is its gastronomy and the quality of its agri-food products. The regions of El Baix Ebre and El Montsià both offer the area's typical rice dishes: arròs negre, rossejat, arròs a banda, paella, etc. They also offer the chance to sample delicacies such as eels and duck ham. The area's seafood also enjoys great renown, particularly oysters and prawns. Delicious sweets are also on offer, including pastissets farcits de cabell d'àngel (pumpkin jam stuffed pastries).

The Ebro Delta plays host to a network of farm shops that sell local food products, the most popular of which is undeniably rice. Farm shops are present in the two information centres at the park (the Ecomuseum and La Casa de Fusta) and also in the two rice growers' cooperatives.

It should be stated that visitors also come to the area because of its events related to the cultivation of rice and other local products:

- Deltebre Town Council has been organising traditional delta cuisine events for eleven years and since 2002 it has held traditional rice festivals.
- L'Aldea Town Council holds a Rice and Trade Fair, which features a number of gastronomic events.
- L'Ampolla Town Council holds a weekly artisanal market in the summer and an annual classical and popular music competition called Eloi Mestre.
- Sant Jaume d'Enveja Town Council has been holding since 2000 the 'Faenes de l'arròs' rice festival on Buda Island, which features traditional seeding and harvesting methods.

## Events

The Natural Park organises a variety of activities on World Bird Day, World Environment Day, International Museum Day and the European Day of Parks. Another initiative that is popular with both locals and visitors to this territory is Green Week, which features a wide range of activities, such as exhibitions, tours, beach cleaning, talks, visits to the park's centres (ichthyology centre, bird recovery, etc.), films, and concerts.

The Delta Birding Festival has been held every year since 2014. It is organised around bird watching and offers an extensive programme of attractive events such as conferences, courses, workshops and competitions, with a major product and service fair for ornithologists and nature lovers.

## Public facilities

In addition to the Ecomuseum and La Casa de Fusta, there are other facilities in the territory that offer exhibitions and information about the area's natural and cultural values: El Montsià Regional Museum and Les Barraques del Delta Interpretation Centre.

The services offered by the park's information centres are complemented with municipal tourist information offices in five towns: Amposta, L'Ampolla, Camarles, Sant Carles de la Ràpita and Sant Jaume d'Enveja.

The range of public services and facilities in the park is as follows:

DELTA DE L'EBRE NATURAL PARK	
<b>Interpretation and information centres</b>	2. Ecomuseum and La Casa de Fusta.
<b>Nature classrooms</b>	2. La Casa de Fusta annexes.
<b>Environmental education centre</b>	1. With three nature classrooms. Ground floor of the park offices.
<b>Documentation centre</b>	1. In the park offices building.
<b>Observatories</b>	3. At the lagoons at L'Encanyissada and El Garxal and at the Ecomuseum.
<b>Lookout points</b>	12. At the lagoons: Les Olles (3), Canal Vell (1), El Garxal (1), L'Alfacada (1), L'Encanyissada (3), La Tancada (1) and La Punta del Fangar (1) and La Punta de la Banya (1).
<b>Self-guided interpretation routes</b>	4. At Les Olles, El Garxal and L'Encanyissada. A route adapted for the sensory and physically challenged around the Ecomuseum.
<b>Bicycle lanes</b>	3. At La Tancada, L'Encanyissada and El Garxal, some 9.5 km in total.
<b>Recreational areas</b>	3 areas: Els Ullals, L'Encanyissada and the Ecomuseum.