

AL HOCEIMA

National status :	National park
Year of creation :	2004
Founding text:	Decree No. 2.04.781 of 8 October 2004
Management body:	High Commission for Water & Forests and combating desertification
Surface area:	48 460 ha
Management category:	II (IUCN 1994)



The Al Hoceima National Park was classified as a SPAMI in 2009 and this classification is justified due to the presence of numerous habitats and species of importance for the conservation of the Mediterranean biodiversity.

Territory

The Al Hoceima National Park is on the Mediterranean side of Morocco, approx. 150 km to the east of the Straits of Gibraltar, to the west of the town of Al Hoceima. This is a marine and coastal protected area. The land surface area amounts to 28 860 ha and the marine area to 19 600 ha.



Physical characteristics

Most of the Al Hoceima National Park covers the Bokkoya mountainous massif. To the north is the sea and the Mestassa valley to the west and to the south and the east it is limited by the watershed with the oued Rhis.

The maritime sides of the Bokkaya Massif are steep with rising cliffs which exceed 300 m in some places and which are made of carbonate material of the calcareous dorsal. Bays and beaches are relatively rare and the steep slopes are inaccessible. The extensions of this range form a basically calcareous sea bed and, along the protected coastline, there are caves and shallow submarine openings likely to form siphons.

The relief is imposing and tortuous with the shore made up of cliffs and caves and several islets and rocks. The seascape is characterized by a rocky sea bed, made up of fallen rocks and blocks of rock, crumbly sea beds and submarine cliffs in sub-vertical bands whose slope becomes less steep as it meets the loose sea bed at 40 - 45 meters. These cliffs are an attractive part of the landscape and have a remarkable biodiversity (fucal forests, coralligenous biocenoses etc.).

Specificity and Importance

The Al Hoceima National Park is one of the main protected areas in the Mediterranean due to its biological richness. This is the only National Park on the Mediterranean coast of Morocco.

This area is of interest due to its closeness to the Atlantic which exerts a physical as well as a bio-ecological influence.

Avifauna: nesting of species of high heritage value such as the fish eagle, Audouin's gull and other emblematic species such as the golden eagle, Bonelli's eagle, imperial eagle and the long-legged buzzard.

There is a healthy forest cover with numerous Mediterranean ligneous species represented in the area and the *Barbary thuya* in particular.

The fucal forests and coralligenous biocenoses are well represented in this sector of the coast. There are also some caves which might be used by the monk seals.

The site has 42 species of heritage interest. They are represented by 12 species of algae, namely the three *Cystoseira*, *C. amentacea*, *C. elegans*, *C. zosteroides* and two laminarians: *Lochroleuca* and *L. rodriguezii*, 11 invertebrates *Astroides calycularis*, *Corallium rubrum*, *Charonia lampas* and *Patella ferruginea* and 19 vertebrates such as *Epinephelus marginatus*, *Caretta caretta*, *Dermochelys coriacea*, *Delphinus delphis*, *Stenella coeruleoalba*, *Tursiops truncatus*, and birds such as *Calonectris diomedea*, *Falco eleonora*, *Hydrobates pelagicus*, *Larus audouinii* and *Pandion haliaetus*.



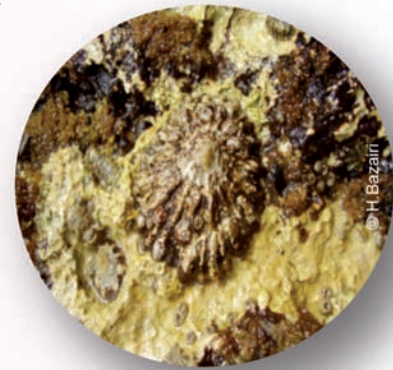
Threats and Pressure

Urban pressure is very low in the National Park even if it seems to be getting stronger on the periphery because of the determined policy to open up and to promote socio-economic development based on tourism along the Kingdom's Mediterranean littoral in general and the littoral of the Al Hoceima Province in particular.

Pressure on sea resources is still perceptible leading to conflicts between the traditional fishermen and industrial fishing. The impact of illegal fishing practices is perceptible on the habitats and the biodiversity. The spawning grounds and sea resources have suffered a lot of damage because of this.

Other external factors exert their influence or constitute a risk for the Park's coastal environment such as hydrocarbon pollution from the fishing boats of Al Hoceima and Cala Iris due to tourism and the risks of a major accident on the International Maritime Route Gibraltar – Suez Canal in view of the unfavourable wind which could directly affect the integrity of the national Park's littoral and its maritime side.

Particular attention should be paid to the great development works and the impact they could have because of increased turbidity due to additional sediments brought in due to the excavations.



Management

The national Park has two management plans; one management plan from 1993 for the land and marine components and a second plan elaborated in 2004 by RAC/SPA within the framework of the MEDMPA project which made it possible to update the management challenges pertaining to the marine aspect.

There is zoning and regulation in the national park for the land and marine areas. The Park's land area is demarcated physically.

The National Park administration consists of a director, an office technician, two field technicians and two guards. The management team has the necessary equipment for control purposes.

The conservation and development programme-project of the Al Hoceima National Park adopted by the High Commission of Water and Forests and combating desertification (2007 -2010) aims to strengthen the capacity of the management unit of the national Park in terms of human resources and equipment.

Cooperation programmes with international bodies aim to initiate, amongst other things, training programmes for the Park's personnel. The actions are mainly supported by financing from foreign donors.

The National Park has established sound partnerships with international NGOs and works with a network of very active local associations providing socio-economic support for conservation measures.

The draft law for protected areas should considerably strengthen the institutional and legal basis for this protected coastal and marine area and impart a new management impetus in line with the conservation challenges.



Source: CAR/ASP (UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA, 2010. The SPAMIs of the Mediterranean Sea. RAC/SPA edit., Tunis: 59 p.)