

# Medes Islands

|                                  |                            |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Legal status                     | Protected Area             |
| Foundation year                  | 1990                       |
| Foundation text                  | Law n°19-90                |
| Management body                  | Departement of Environment |
| Superficy                        | 511 ha                     |
| Management category (IUCN, 1994) | IV                         |



## Territory

The small archipelago of the Medes Islands, is made up of seven small islands and some reefs situated scarcely a mile from the village of L'Estartit, in the Catalan coast of Empordà in the middle of the "Costa Brava". The islands are a geologically the extension of de Montgri Massif into the sea.



Medes Islands has been a SPAMI since 2001 thanks to the extraordinary biological and ecological value for its variety of sub-species and micro-environmental and for their exceptional scientific value.

## Physical features

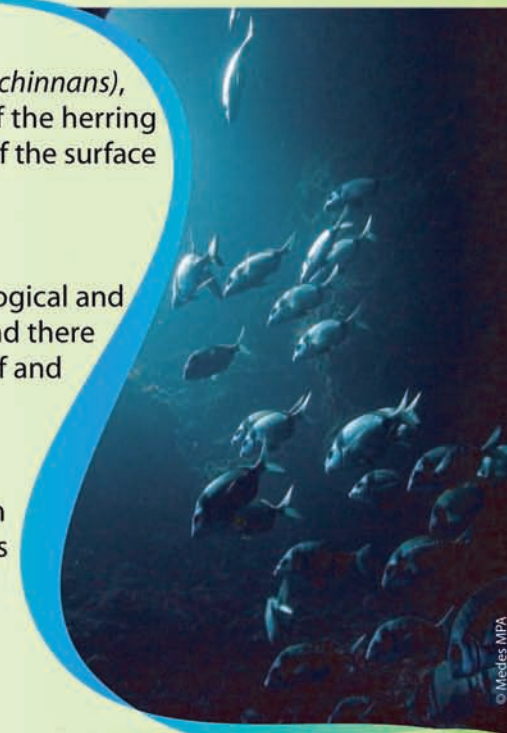
The adjacent coastline and the estuary of the River Ter, which provides a source of organic material; the influence of northerly winds and currents that contribute to deep-water circulation, which in turn provides organic nutrient enrichment of the environment, different depths of seawater around the islands; contrasting sea-bed formations (of both rock and sand); and karst-type land formations, with numerous tunnels, cavities and caves.

## Specificities and importance

The most spectacular bird colony is that of the yellow-legged gull (*Larus cachinnans*), which until very recently was considered to be a more common variety of the herring gull (*Larus argentatus*). Numbering over 8,000 pairs, it occupies almost all of the surface area of the islands, with the breeding season.

Medes islands underwater communities constituted an extraordinary biological and ecological value, due to the wide variety of environments and species found there (1345 marine taxa in the plant and animal groups studied), in the setting of and extremely beautiful landscape that is unique in Catalonia.

A cornice of calcified algae (*Lithophyllum Tortuosum*), situated at sea level in the wave-break area, comprises around 75% of the perimeter of the Medes Islands.





## Threats and Pressures



Although there is a limited number of daily diving allowed, the number of scubadivers is very high.

Otherwise, the extraction of the natural resources is regulated in the protected area and totally prohibited in the highly protected area.

In spite of the heavy pressure of tourism, on-going developments involving the natural heritage are positive, as a result of existing legal safeguards.

Scientific monitoring shows that conservation and developments are favourable.



## Management

Management Plan was approved in 2004 by the Advisor Council of Islas Medes Protected Area.

Four-year plans regulates the different activities (majority are tourist activities) done at the zone. Temporary plans allow getting a well-maintained development.

The zoning establishes two protection levels:

- the protected zone where game fishing/angling with just one rod, diving and sailing are permitted
- the highly protected zone where diving with a permit, mooring in pre-established places, sailing up to a speed of 3 knots and mooring only between sunrise and sunset, are permitted.

Financing comes from Department of the Environment of the Government of Catalonia and Supramunicipal Administration Authorities. It is also self-financing as a result of concessions for diving and other activities.

The difficulty of controlling the different forms of use permitted in the area and access by fishing activities, because of difficulty of permanent guarding.

A large number of scientific studies have, and continue to be, undertaken in the protected area of the Medes Islands. Study series of up to 10 years exist for certain species and its wealth of natural resources has been made widely known and it is now well-known by the population.

