



## **Nature conservation in a holiday area – the Playa de Matorral on Fuerteventura**

Since the 1960s, Fuerteventura, the second largest of the Canary Islands, has developed into an important tourist destination. Especially the south of the island around the former fishing village of Morro Jable on the Jandia peninsula is a hotspot of tourism on the island. Apart from a narrow coastal strip around Morro Jable, almost the entire peninsula has been protected as the Jandía Natural Park (Parque Natural de Jandía) since 1987. Since the development of tourism began in the mid-1960s with the Casa Atlántica hotel in Jandia Playa on the south coast, nature conservation and tourism have had to be reconciled. This applies



in particular to the coastal salt marshes between the hotel zone and the actual sandy beach. The beach itself counts as a special zone with restricted use, which, however, means practically no restrictions for tourists. There are plenty of beach bars, deck chairs and surfing facilities on the wide sandy beach.

Between the beach and the Jandia coastal motorway (and the hotel behind) lies the Matorral - a 115.6-hectare salt marsh. It is the only wetland in the Canaries to be included in the list of wetlands of international importance (RAMSAR Convention). Such coastal salt marshes are rare in the Canary Islands. The Matorral is also home to some endemic invertebrates and reptiles. Endemic species are those that only exist in a certain geographical area, for example only on a certain island or group of islands.

The low vegetation is characterised by salt-loving plants (halophytes) that withstand the high salinity of the soil through occasional flooding. These occur mainly during spring and autumn as spring tides around the equinoxes. Typical of the area are seabirds and waders for which the wetland is an important stopover in bird migration. A detailed description of the plant and animal species living there can be found in Spanish here:

<https://rsis.ramsar.org/RISapp/files/RISrep/ES1262RIS.pdf>.

Access is strictly prohibited and the area is secured by a wooden fence. No human use occurs on the site. A wooden boardwalk leads from the main road across the salt marshes to the strand and ends at the lighthouse, which is visible from afar and counts as the landmark of Jandia. Signs not only point out the ban to enter the marsh, but also explain the importance of the Matorral as a wetland. For tourists, this may mean small diversions to the beach, as there are only two crossings on the almost three kilometres of extension along the shore. Nevertheless, nature conservation and tourism seem to harmonise well at this point.