

Sea Life of the Mar Menor

The Mar Menor is a unique marine environment. Its shallow waters mean that the temperature fluctuates more than the Mediterranean and due to evaporation during the summer months it becomes 25% saltier than the Med. Over the next few weeks I will be writing about the many different species that live in the Mar Menor. I will describe the creatures that you may see while swimming, snorkelling or even just paddling. This week I will consider the geology of the Mar Menor, how it was formed and its history.

The Mar Menor used to be part of the Mediterranean. La Manga "The Sleeve" was formed by lava, which was released due to movement in the Earth's plates.



Sediment then washed down from the Rio Segura and settled around the lava that was deposited and gradually the Mar Menor became separated from the Mediterranean Sea.

In Roman times it was an important industrial area with large-scale salt production. The Mar Menor was also used as a port and a place of refuge by seafarers. The waters must have been



much deeper at that time, as there is evidence of large ships coming into the Mar Menor. There were also a number of deep-water entry points into the Mar Menor from the Mediterranean. Since that time, the silting up of the Mar Menor and the formation of La Manga has continued, until it is as we see it today.

During the reign of Alfonso X in the 13th Century the area was primarily inhabited by fishermen and shepherds. Pirates were a constant problem, which prevented others setting in the area.

In the 1800s the islands and the area around the Mar Menor were owned by King Amadeo of Saboya and were part of his Royal Hunting Reserves. Wildlife was plentiful around the Mar Menor at that time, with deer living on both the mainland and on the Islands, hence the name, Isla del Ciervo (Deer Island).

Did you know that Isla del Baron is named after The Baron of Benifayo who was the first resident of the Island? He was keeping a low profile, as he had killed a man in a duel over a princess. The look out tower on the Island was built in the 1950's, based on Frank Lloyd Wright's designs (very famous American modernist



architect 1867-1959). Today although it is a private island, it is available for rent.

Fishing has always been an important way of life on the Mar Menor. The fishing nets you see on the water today are of a design that has been used for many years. The net, or "moruna", is strung perpendicularly from the shore, at the other end it is arranged in a spiral. The fish swim up to the net, they then swim along its length to try and get around it. Unfortunately for them, they do not find the end but are trapped in the spiral and unable to escape.

The main types of fish gathered from the Mar Menor today are Eel and Mullet, however, Anchovies, Prawns, Sea Bream and Red Mullet are also caught.

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