

**STAYUPON**  
HOSPITALITY GROUP



# BIRDWATCHING AND ORNITHERAPY GUIDE

*Estuário do Tejo · Alcochete*





# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve, especially in the Alcochete area, is one of the most important wetlands in Europe. The Tagus Estuary is not only one of the largest wetlands in Europe, but also the largest wetland in Portugal. Its salt marshes, salt pans and tidal channels create a perfect refuge for thousands of birds throughout the year.

Amid gentle sounds and songs, ever-changing light, and wide horizons, birdwatching here becomes an exercise in contemplation, well-being, and intimate connection with nature.

This guide invites you not only to discover the species inhabiting the estuary but also to practice Ornithotherapy, a simple and deeply restorative way to be fully present through the observation of birds.



# 2. WHAT IS ORNITHOTHERAPY

## *Framework and Benefits*

Ornithotherapy combines birdwatching with natural mindfulness techniques. Through a gentle and calm gaze, slow breathing, and effortless observation, the body responds with relaxation, mental clarity, and stress reduction.

### *Proven benefits:*

- Rapid reduction of stress and anxiety
- Improved focus and emotional well-being
- Sense of connection to nature and the territory
- Stimulation of curiosity and sensory perception (hearing, sight)

### *Quick exercise (1 minute):*

- Inhale slowly while observing the horizon.
- Choose a bird and simply follow its movements, without trying to identify it.
- Finish with 10 seconds of complete silence.

You can also do this exercise focusing only on the sounds of the birds. Without trying to identify them, notice how many different sounds you can distinguish. Concentrate on each to memorize them.



# 3. THE TAGUS ESTUARY NATURAL RESERVE



- Area: 14.192 ha
- Classification: Natural Reserve
- Wintering: up to 120.000 birds
- Habitats: salt marshes, mudflats, reedbeds, salinas, lagoons



The estuary is a dynamic zone: each tide reveals a different landscape and distinct bird behaviors. Here, life follows the rhythm of the water.

## 4. SPECIES YOU MAY OBSERVE

Birdwatching in Alcochete is rich, varied, and often surprising. Below are detailed profiles, curiosities, and the best times to spot each species.



### **Greater Flamingo** (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)



**When to see:** ALL year; most abundant in autumn and winter

**Where:** Samouco Salinas, mudflat areas along the promenade

**Curiosity:** Flamingos stir the water with their feet to bring food to the surface. Juveniles are grey before turning pink. At high tide, entire groups often take flight simultaneously – an iconic estuary image.

**When to see:** Mainly spring and summer; present almost all year

**Where:** Samouco Salinas and EVOA

**Curiosity:** One of the few birds with an upward-curved bill, which it sweeps through the water rhythmically. On calm days, small groups feed in synchronized movements, appearing to “sew” the water’s surface.

### **Pied Avocet**

(*Recurvirostra avosetta*)



### **Eurasian Spoonbill**

*(Platalea leucorodia)*



**When to see:** Autumn to early spring

**Where:** Samouco Salinas and EVOA lagoons

**Curiosity:** Its spoon-shaped bill sweeps side to side like a delicate spade. Young spoonbills often group together, learning feeding techniques by imitating adults.

**When to see:** All year

**Where:** Pancas salt marshes, tidal channels, promenade.

**Curiosity:** Can remain motionless for several minutes, waiting for the perfect moment to catch prey. At dawn, it may land silently, as if emerging from the mist itself.

### **Grey Heron**

*(Ardea cinerea)*



**Quando ver:** Winter and spring; present all year

**Onde:** Offshore Alcochete; on posts or trunks drying its wings

**Curiosidade:** Unlike other water birds, its feathers are not fully waterproof, hence the characteristic sun-drying posture.

Cormorant groups often dive in a coordinated way – a fascinating example of cooperative fishing.

### **Great Cormorant**

*(Phalacrocorax carbo)*



## Waders

(sandpipers, plovers,  
snipes, stilts)



**When to see:** Low tide, all year; peak diversity August–March

**Where:** Exposed mudflats along the promenade and Samouco

**Curiosity:** Each species has a bill adapted to a specific feeding depth or type, avoiding competition. As the tide rises, these birds move “ahead of the water” or fly together, creating a natural choreography.



# 4. BEST OBSERVATION SPOTS

- **Alcochete Promenade:** excellent for observing tidal movements and large wader flocks
- **Samouco Salinas:** high diversity; ideal for flamingos, spoonbills, and saltwater species
- **Sítio das Hortas / Pancas Salt Marsh:** quiet area perfect for contemplative ornithotherapy  
práticas contemplativas de orniterapia.
- **EVOA – Birdwatching and Visitor Centre:** ideal for beginners and photographers





## WHEN TO VISIT

- November–March: highest concentration of wintering birds
- Spring–Summer: nesting and active adult and juvenile behavior
- Low tide: waders fully exposed and very active
- Mid-rising tide: natural approach of birds to observation areas



## ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

- 8× or 10× binoculars
- Discreet clothing (green, grey, brown)
- Field notebook
- Sunscreen, water, hat
- Bird guide (recommended app)



## GOOD OBSERVATION PRACTICES

- Move slowly and silently
- Keep distance from birds and nests
- Respect official trails
- Do not feed wildlife
- Leave nature as you found it



# 5. SUGGESTED TRAILS

## Trail 1 — Promnade - Pancas Salt Marsh

(1-1.5h)

*Ideal for beginners in ornithotherapy*

- Start at the promenade (low tide = best experience)
- Follow the waterline to Sítio das Hortas
- Recommended silent moments along the mudflats

## Trail 2 — Samouco Salinas (1-2h)

*Circular route through historic salinas*

- Perfect for flamingos, waders, and spoonbills
- Stops along the trail for breathing exercises

## Trail 3 — EVOA

(2h-3h)

*Structured experience with observation hides*

- Ideal for photographers
- Guided learning on species and migrations



# 6. ALCOCHETE: ESTUARY, WELL-BEING, AND LOCAL LIFE

Birdwatching in Alcochete is also a way to experience the territory at the estuary's natural rhythm — dictated by the tides rather than the clock. Here, every experience adapts to the movement of the water.



## *Suggested full experience (tide-adaptable):*

- Before setting out: check the tide and choose your trail accordingly (low tide for waders, mid-rising tide for approaching birds).
- First moment: walk through the salinas, promenade, or along the salt marsh, integrating ornithotherapy exercises and mindful listening.
- Calm break: enjoy a peaceful lunch at Restaurante Omaggio, Praia do Sal Resort — a serene and inviting space for a restorative pause before returning to the estuary.
- Observation moment: when the tide becomes favourable again, take in the estuary from the Upon Vila rooftop — one of the best spots to enjoy the sunset over the Tagus and the serene flight of the birds as they head towards their resting places.
- Exploration of the area: stroll through Alcochete's historic center and traditional shops, for a gentle and authentic discovery of the destination.
- Relaxation moment: at Praia do Sal Spa, enjoy a deep moment of tranquility with two ornithotherapy-inspired treatments, accompanied by the soft sounds of the Tagus Estuary birds, prolonging the sense of calm and connection with nature.
- Local experience complement: after the trail, the waterfront cafés are perfect to review photos or simply enjoy the changing tide.

The Tagus Estuary offers much more than observation: it provides rhythm, silence, discovery, and breathing space. Here, each bird tells a story, and each tide transforms the landscape. May this guide accompany you in peaceful walks and moments of serene presence.

**Happy birdwatching!**

