



- The Flamingo, the Camargue's most emblematic bird -

This spectacularly coloured, long-legged, waterbird has probably inhabited the southern Camargue ever since its existence, but it wasn't until the 20th century, with the start of interest in environmental issues, that biologists took an interest in them. Indeed, with man's progressive control of the Rhône River and Mediterranean Sea starting in the mid-19th century, this species that breeds in large colonies on low-lying islands in the middle of saline lagoons no longer found conditions suitable for nesting. The Flamingo thus became rare and a lost part of the wild origin of the Rhône delta.

Thanks to the determination of conservationists at the Tour du Valat research station, notably its founder Dr. Luc Hoffman, the fate of the Flamingo in the Camargue changed as from the early 1970s. An artificial island was built in a lake belonging to the Saltpan company in order to provide more suitable nesting conditions for the species.

And it was a rapid, resounding, success! The Flamingos adopted, with their proper fidelity, their island in the Fangassier (a place where we stay – in Provençal, the local language) and have never left, nesting in their thousands each year since. The population is in far better condition today than 50 years ago in which time the species has passed from having the status of a rarity to that of the undoubted star of the Camargue and its outlying lagoons.

And yet, the Flamingo's story may change once again, and again in relation with man's land use in the area. With the end of salt production and the sale of the Fangassier saltpan to the "Conservatoire du Littoral" (*coastal conservancy*), there's yet another new perspective for our flamboyant Mediterranean friend.

During 2015 a new island has been built for the Flamingo. Near the old site but where water levels and salinity will be controlled more naturally, especially with more exchange with the sea.

So the Flamingo, saved by man in the past, will now start on a new adventure with him. An adventure in which man first assured its destiny in order to save the species and which now leaves nature to its own devices to work for its own sustainability... a wild, beautiful species that brings its special elegance to all Mediterranean lagoons... to live for up to 40 years.

From Gael Hémerly

To find out more about the Camargue's birds :

Visit our web site and discover our recently produced brochure
"Where to watch birds in the Camargue Regional Nature Park"
www.parc-camargue.fr/where-to-watch-birds-in-the-camargue.html