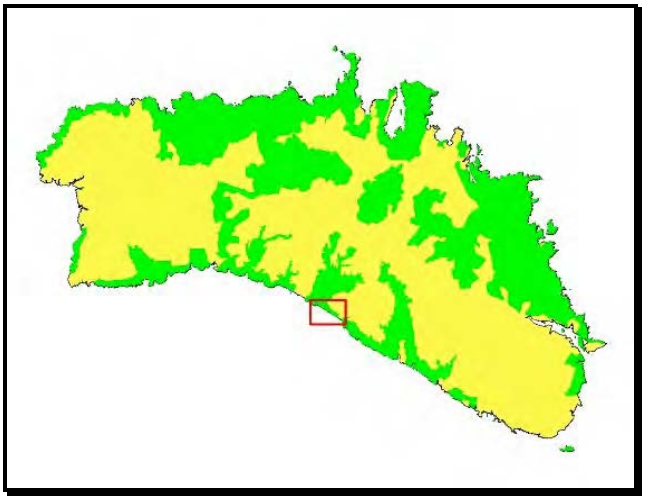
## Fitxa 1 SON BOU



### DADES GEOGRÀFIQUES I FÍSIQUES:

**Municipality:** Alaior.
**Other names of the place:** Unknown.
**Urban areas related:** Son Bou, Torresolí Nou and Sant Jaume.
**Access:** by car. From the main road Me-1 (Maó - Ciutadella) there are two routes: Torresolí Nou and Son Bou. Beach with car park.
**Beach location:** south.
**Beach surface area:** 60.040 $m^2$.
**Beach length:** 2500 m
**Beach average width:** 50 m
**Beach occupation level:** during high season, medium on the urban area and low on the unspoiled area.
**Geology of the area:** carbonated shelf of the Upper Miocene, made up of white calcareous rocks.
**Sediment composition:** of organic carbonated origin (+90%), with a high proportion of fine grains and white in colour.
**Protected natural area:** included within the Natural Area of Special Interest Me-12 and Nature Net 2000.

### SERVICES AVAILABLE ON THE BEACH:

**Beach classification according to the CIMe:** it is considered A type (urban), with all kind of services available.
**Distance to the car park:** 25 m within the urban area.
**SOS service:** on the urban beach area there are permanent lifeguard services and surveillance towers; on the unspoiled area, there is a first-aid service available.
**Other services:** picnic area with tables and chairs behind the urban beach; public transport service connecting the island's towns.

## SURROUNDINGS AND LANDSCAPE

The area of Son bou is a break in the usual landscape of the southern minorcan coast. Instead of a small cove surrounded by high rocky walls, the visitor finds an extensive plain with a humid area fed by two rivers coming through the Bec and Son boter ravines.

It is the longest and largest beach on the island, with a related dune system acting as a arm of sand that divides the sea from the humid area. The dune system is made up of belts parallel to the coast, of different heights never exceeding two meters. This layout of the belts, so usual in other places, is virtually unique in Menorca. The condition of the dune system is, in general, good and there are no strong erosion processes noticed.

The Son Bou salt marsh is the second most important wet area in Menorca. Surplus water reaches the sea through two gorges crossing the beach and from a third artifical exit broken up into the rock, located on the most western end, in the Talis area.

Son Bou is one of the most open beaches in Menorca. On the eastern end, on the Cap de le sPenyes, the rocky walls can reach 70 and 80 meters in height in a vertical shape towards the sea. On the western end, the cliffs are much lower (5 or 10 meters) but as vertical as the others.

## PLANTS

This is one of the few beaches in Menorca where you can observe an ordered dune vegetation according to the classic models. The parallel layout of the dune fronts creates an area division very clear of the plants, which also goes along these longitudinal bands. Hence, on the front line there would be the pioneer plants, those which tolerate better the sand mobility and the direct contact with the sea, that at the same time arrives full of organic remains left by the waves. In general they are annual plants, and frequently succulent: prickly saltwort (*Salsola kali*), sea knot grass (*Polygonum maritimum*), European sea rocket (*Cakile maritima*) and *Suaeda spicata*. This is the vegetation that suffers the most from human pressure and therefore it is very scarce in these kind of beaches.

The second line starts where dunes begin to take shape and are plants with strong roots adapated to live on this sand that moves with the wind. These are stronger species: Marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*), beach lily (*Pancratium maritimum*), morning glory (*Calystegia soldanella*), sea thistle (*Eryngium maritimum*), and four leaf cross wort *Crucianella maritima*, (plant) that can only be found on very few beaches of the southern coast (see previous photo).

Going towards the interior these plants make way for other usual plants on the sand which is more established: sea lotus flowers (*Lotus cytisoides*), sweet Alison (*Lobularia maritima*), and (*Reichardia tingitana*). Finally, on the rear part there are woody plants: lentiscus (*Pistacia lentiscus*) and Phoenician juniper (*Juniperus phoenicea*). These are those which, more permanently, fix the dunes and give an important amount of organic matter which allows other plants from environments not strictly sandy to establish here as well.

At the rear and still on the salt marsh of Son Bou, there is a predominance of junipers (*Juncus acutus* and *J. maritimus*) on the edges, and the common reed (*Phragmites australis*) more towards the centre. In spring the yellow lilies appear giving colour (*Iris pseudacorus*) (see adjoining photo), and there aretangles of bindweed everywhere (*Calystegia sepium*).

## ANIMALS

With the abundant mantle of dune vegetation, there are different types of butterflies which frequent the area. However, the richest type of fauna is found in the salt marsh of Son Bou where, every winter, more than 500 acquatic sea birds of 30 different species congregate. (ducks, herons, coots, sandpipers, etc.). Also every summer the mallard (*Anas platyrrhinchos*), the water rail (*Rallus aquaticus*), the Eurasian coot (*Fulica atra*) and the purple moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), amongst other sea birds, nest.

The reed bed in Son Bou, is one of the large and best preserved on the island, and forms the main area for different species of small birds to nest (from the passerine group) on the humid zones. The most frequent examples are the Cetti's warbler (*Cettia cetti*) (see adjoining photo), the great reed warbler (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*), the marsh warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) or the moustached warbler (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*); this last species is expanding within the Mediterranean and arrived in Menorca in the eighties.

## IN THE SEA

The bottom of the beach of Son Bou is very homogenous throughout the whole swimming area and is almost exclusively made up of fine sand. At a certain distance from the beach, the sandy sea bed is subsituted by posidonia (*Posidonia oceanica*) which makes up one of the most extensive meadows in Menorca. This is only curtailed by two submarine drainage channels which are responsible, in part for the strange currents which flow on the beach (see adjoining photo)

On the small reefs are which spread along the sandy coastline, brown alga, known as *Cystoseira*, is always in abundance which is an unmistakable indicator of the excellent quality of the water. On the sandy sea beds, one cannot see many fish but clever observers may distinguish some flounders (*Bothus podas*) half buried and well camouflaged in the sand, some shoals of loach (*Liza* spp.) or a flying gurnard (*Dactylopterus volitans*) having spectacular colours.

## HISTORY AND PECULIARITIES

On the eastern edge we can see a rectangular floor of a Palaeo Christian basilica of the Fifth Century AD. On the other side of the beach is a Spanish defence tower from the beginning of the XIX Century, which is called the Tower of Son Bou or the Esfondrada Tower.

During the civil war, different defensive structures were built along the beach and they can still be seen today, especially in the Talis area which is to the west.

Formerly, in the forties, the salt marsh had been used to grow rice, an agricultural practice which upset the natural development of the humid zone and which led to the creation of a third drainage channel (see adjoining photo).