

Blue lines indicate the area meeting the ISRA Criteria; dashed lines indicate the suggested buffer for use in the development of appropriate place-based conservation measures

PASITO BLANCO-EL PAJAR ISRA

European Atlantic Region

SUMMARY

Pasito Blanco-El Pajar is located on the southern coast of Gran Canaria Island, Canary Islands, Spain. It encompasses the Bahía de Santa Águeda and a wide shelf with a gentle slope. The area is characterised by rocky reefs, basaltic platforms, sandy plains, seagrass meadows, and volcanic features. It is influenced by the Canary Current and the seasonal coastal upwelling system off northwest Africa. The area overlaps with the Oceanic Islands and Seamounts of the Canary Region Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area. Within this area there are: **threatened species** (e.g., Common Smoothhound *Mustelus mustelus*); **reproductive areas** (Spiny Butterfly Ray *Gymnura altavela*); and **undefined aggregations** (Common Smoothhound).

CRITERIA

Criterion A - Vulnerability; Sub-criterion C1 - Reproductive Areas; Sub-criterion C5 - Undefined Aggregations

—	—
SPAIN	—
—	—
0-15 metres	—
—	—
6.78 km²	—
—	—



DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Pasito Blanco-El Pajar is located on the southern coast of Gran Canaria Island, Canary Islands, Spain. It encompasses the Bahía de Santa Águeda and a wide shelf with a gentle slope, including shallow platforms and ledges near the coastline. The area is characterised by rocky reefs, basaltic platforms, sandy plains, seagrass meadows, and volcanic features such as overhangs, ledges, and shallow caves with medium to fine sand and scattered gravel substrates (Rays of Paradise & Latitud Azul per. obs. 2025).

The area is influenced by the Canary Current and the seasonal coastal upwelling system off northwest Africa, which brings cold, nutrient-rich waters that enhance primary productivity, especially from the boreal spring to autumn (Gómez-Letona et al. 2017; Espino-Ruano et al. 2023). Due to its location, the area is moderately exposed to Atlantic Ocean swells and local tidal currents, which influence sediment redistribution and the structure of the water column.

This area overlaps with the Oceanic Islands and Seamounts of the Canary Region Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area (EBSA; CBD 2025).

This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthic and pelagic and is delineated from inshore and surface waters (0 m) to 15 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

CRITERION A – VULNERABILITY

Two Qualifying Species considered threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species regularly occur in the area. These are the Endangered Common Smoothhound (Jabado et al. 2021) and Spiny Butterfly Ray (Dulvy et al. 2021).

SUB-CRITERION C₁ – REPRODUCTIVE AREAS

Pasito Blanco-El Pajar is an important reproductive area for one ray species.

Spiny Butterfly Ray aggregations of adult females are regularly observed in this area between June–November (Espino-Ruano et al. 2023; Rays of Paradise unpubl. data 2025). Between May 2017–December 2019, monthly scientific surveys (n = 30) were conducted using random 50 m transects, with two snorkelers surveying each transect along the beach at depths of 0–5 m for three minutes (Rays of Paradise unpubl. data 2025). Spiny Butterfly Rays observed in the area were recorded, sexed, and measured for total length (TL; from the tip of the snout to the end of the tail) and disc width (DW) (Espino-Ruano et al. 2023). Measurements were estimated by approaching the resting rays with a tape measure while they were on the seafloor (Espino-Ruano et al. 2023). Additionally, between 2020–2024, a research campaign was conducted every year during September (two days per campaign, maximum of 4 h per day, except in 2020 when only one survey day was conducted) in this area. Surveys were conducted at 0–1 m depth while walking and capturing the rays with hand nets. Individuals were measured (DW) and ultrasounds were performed (Rays of Paradise unpubl. data 2025).

Between May 2017–December 2019, 17 sightings comprising a total of 982 Spiny Butterfly Rays were recorded in the area. Of these, 12 sightings (70.6%) were aggregations, comprising between 3–198 individuals (mean = 28). All individuals were adult females ranging in size between 100–175 cm TL (Espino-Ruano et al. 2023; Rays of Paradise unpubl. data 2025). Pregnancy of Spiny Butterfly Rays

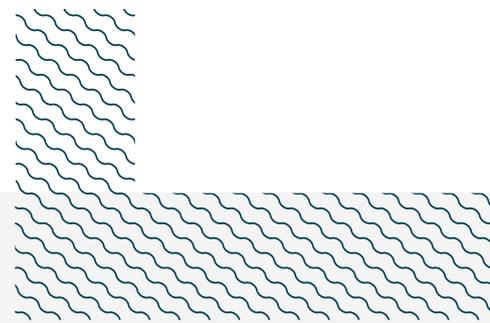
was confirmed between 2020–2024. More than half of the females were pregnant, from a total of 73 Spiny Butterfly Rays captured between 2020–2024, ranging in size between 98–125 cm DW (Rays of Paradise unpubl. data 2025). Pregnancy was inferred from abdominal distension and ultrasound (2022–2024) and rays presented developing embryos varying in size (Rays of Paradise unpubl. data 2025). These reproductive aggregations of pregnant and non-pregnant females followed a seasonal pattern following the rise of sea surface temperature occurring from June–November and peaking in September when the sea surface temperature fluctuates between 19–24°C (Espino-Ruano et al. 2023). Site fidelity in this area has been documented for this species between September–November 2022–2025 through passive acoustic telemetry (n = 73 tagged individuals) (Rays of Paradise unpubl. data 2025). It is hypothesised that during the remainder of the year, individuals likely migrate to deeper waters or other unknown locations (Espino-Ruano et al. 2023; Rays of Paradise unpubl. data 2025). Pasito Blanco-El Pajar hosts the largest observed aggregation of the species in Gran Canaria Island (Espino-Ruano et al. 2023).

CRITERION C5 - UNDEFINED AGGREGATIONS

Pasito Blanco-El Pajar is important for undefined aggregations of one shark species.

The area has been identified as one of two aggregation sites for juvenile and subadult Common Smoothhound around Gran Canaria Island (Espino et al. 2022). Information was collected on shark observations around the island between 1980–2020 from ~20 recreational anglers, spearfishers, commercial and recreational divers, marine scientists, underwater photographers, and dive centre managers (Espino et al. 2022). Data collected included location, date, number of individuals, and visually estimated total length (TL) (Espino et al. 2022). Additionally, opportunistic observations were recorded in the area between 2019–2025 (Latitud Azul unpubl. data 2025).

In 2019, 2020, and 2025, a total of 13 aggregations of Common Smoothhound were observed in the area (Espino et al. 2022; Latitud Azul unpubl. data 2025). Aggregation sizes typically ranged from 10–100 individuals (mean = 44) (Espino et al. 2022; Latitud Azul unpubl. data 2025). Although aggregations were observed in January and February, most occurred during May and June (85%) (Espino et al. 2022; Latitud Azul unpubl. data 2025). Individuals ranged between 35–100 cm TL (Espino et al. 2022). Size-at-maturity for the species ranges from 70 to 124 cm TL (Ebert et al. 2021), indicating that the aggregations consisted of juveniles and adults. Aggregations occurred at shallow depths (<3 m) over sandy-rocky substrates (Espino et al. 2022; Latitud Azul unpubl. data 2025). Further information is required to understand the nature and function of these aggregations.



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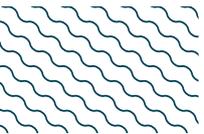
QUALIFYING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category	Global Depth Range (m)	ISRA Criteria/Sub-criteria Met									
				A	B	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	D1	D2	
SHARKS													
<i>Mustelus mustelus</i>	Common Smoothhound	EN	0-800	X							X		
RAYs													
<i>Gymnura altavela</i>	Spiny Butterfly Ray	EN	0-150	X		X							

SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
SHARKS		
<i>Squatina squatina</i>	Angelshark	CR
RAYS		
<i>Aetomylaeus bovinus</i>	Duckbill Eagle Ray	CR
<i>Dasyatis pastinaca</i>	Common Stingray	VU
<i>Myliobatis aquila</i>	Common Eagle Ray	CR
<i>Taeniurops grabatus</i>	Round Fantail Stingray	NT
<i>Torpedo marmorata</i>	Marbled Torpedo Ray	VU

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species Categories are available by searching species names at www.iucnredlist.org. Abbreviations refer to: CR, Critically Endangered; EN, Endangered; VU, Vulnerable; NT, Near Threatened; LC, Least Concern; DD, Data Deficient.





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