

ESTATUS Y CONSERVACIÓN DE AVES MARINAS

ECOGEOGRAFIA Y PLAN DE ACCION PARA EL MEDITERRANEO

STATUS AND CONSERVATION OF SEABIRDS

ECOGEOGRAPHY AND MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

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BREEDING STATUS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN GULL (*Larus melanocephalus*) IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

by

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INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*) has a curious distribution: the bulk of the world population (97%!) is concentrated on some offshore islands of the Tendra Bay in the north-west corner of the Black Sea (Ukraine) and, in much smaller numbers, in the Sea of Azov, with even a recent spread further east of Rostov/Don. In the Tendra Bay, its numbers have increased in the last 30 years, reaching 224 000 breeding pairs in 1980 and 336 000 breeding pairs in 1985 (for overviews, see Mayaud, 1954 & 1956; Isenmann, 1982; Cramp & Simmons, 1982; Siokhin *et al.*, 1988). The species has bred in the past in large numbers on the Razelm and Sinoe lagoons in Romania; however no recent breeding evidence can be found. In Bulgaria, some old breeding claims by Pateff and Prostov (in Robel & Königstedt, 1980) are rather dubious; only recent breeding could be firmly proved at Lake Atanasov with 4 breeding pairs in 1974 (Botev & Peshev in Uhlig, 1988); 8-10 breeding pairs in 1983 (Kantardziev & Bedev, 1984) and even 200 breeding pairs in 1984 but only one in 1987 (Nankinov, this volume).

I. THE SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

Besides the main breeding area in the Soviet Union, the species breeds in the following Mediterranean countries (see Figure 1):

Greece

It is the only country outside the Soviet Union which harbours relatively important though highly fluctuating breeding figures. Goutner (1986a) summarized the known facts indicating that most of the past and recent breeding sites in deltas (Axios-Loudias, Nestos) have been deserted after habitat loss by agricultural development. Since the 1980s, only two regular breeding points remain: the Alyki lagoon with increasing numbers and the Evros delta with decreasing numbers (see also Goutner & Kattoulas, 1984; Goutner, 1986b).

Turkey

Old breeding records were published without any quantitative information (Isenmann, 1982). In 1971-1973 breeding pairs were found on some Anatolian lakes (Bulok, Kucuk, Kulu, Seyfe) with up to 50 breeding pairs per site (Isenmann, 1982; Husband & Kasperek, 1984; Kasperek, 1987). In more recent years breeding was recorded in 1981 at Pinarbasi/Kayseri (2 breeding pairs), in 1982 at Bulok Gölü (300 breeding pairs) and in 1987 at Kulu Gölü (50 breeding pairs) (Kasperek, in litt.) but only suspected in 1982 at Lake Sultan (Kasperek, 1985) and at Lake Bafa (Kasperek, 1988).

Italy

This species was found breeding for the first time in 1978 with no less than 25 breeding pairs in the Valli di Comacchio (Ravenna), south of the Po delta. Breeding became regular and

the population reached 197 breeding pairs in 1982 (Brichetti & Isenmann, 1981; Brichetti & Foschi, 1985 and 1986; Fasola, 1986). In 1987 and in 1988 the number of breeding pairs decreased to respectively 100 and 48 (Brichetti & Foschi, in litt.) A second breeding site was found in 1982 in the Valle Bertuzzi close to the first site with 2 breeding pairs (Fasola, 1986) and 1 170 in 1988 (Brichetti & Foschi, in litt.).

France

The first breeding record was in 1965 in the Camargue. The number of pairs was very low, with up to 7 breeding pairs per year until 1980. Their numbers varied from 13 in 1982 (Isenmann *et al.*, 1986) to 37 breeding pairs in 1988 (Johnson & Walmsley, in litt.).

Spain

Capellà *et al.* (1985) saw one adult on a nest with eggs in an Audouin's Gull (*Larus audouinii*) colony in 1984 on Mallorca (Balearic Islands). In 1987 and in 1988, one pair bred (breeding successful only in 1988) in the Ebro delta (Martinez-Vilalta, 1988). These are the first breeding records for a country whose Mediterranean offshore areas constitute one of the main known wintering areas with at least 50 000 birds (Isenmann, 1982; Carrera & Garcia, 1986; de Juana & Paterson, 1986, Carrera, 1988).

No breeding records are known from the Middle East and the Mediterranean coast of North Africa¹ where the species regularly winters in relatively small numbers (Isenmann, 1982, Cramp & Simmons, 1982; Goodman & Meininger, 1989), except in Tunisia where 7 500 birds were counted in the winter 1977/1978 (Czajkowski in Isenmann, 1982).

It is worth remembering that besides all the above-mentioned breeding sites, a few isolated pairs breed each year (generally among Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) or Common Gulls (*Larus canus*)) in many European countries (Isenmann, 1982; Cramp & Simmons, 1982).

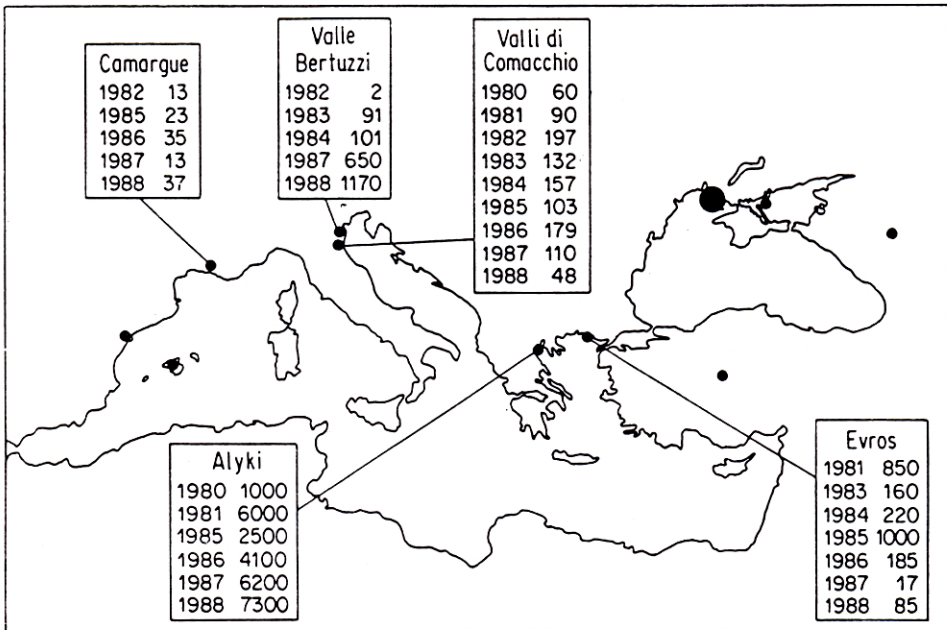


Figure 1: Breeding distribution of the Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*) (the numbers of breeding pairs in recent years are given for the five main breeding sites in the Mediterranean Basin, for details and references see text).

¹ According to *British Birds* 83, 1990, p. 12, the species has bred in 1988 on the Korba lagoons in Tunisia!

	FRANCE	ITALY	GREECE	
	Camargue	Valli di Comacchio	Evros delta	Alyki
<u>Area status</u>				
Ramsar site	-	+	+	-
Private property	+	-	-	-
<u>Threats in colonies</u>				
Threats of habitat (destruction, alteration, change in use)	-	-	+	+
Disturbance by people (studies, photographers, fishermen)	-	+	*	*
Disturbance by predators	-	-	+	*
Poisoning (through feeding)	-(n.d)	-(n.d)	+	-
<u>Potential threats outside colonies</u>				
Shooting	-	*	-(n.d)	*

Table 1 Summary of conservation conditions and problems in the main Mediterranean breeding areas (* = occasionally; n.d. = no data).

II. HABITAT REQUIREMENTS AND OTHER HABITS

The typical breeding habitat of this gull is grassy offshore and inshore islands with lagoons and a steppic cultivated or uncultivated hinterland where the birds collect their diet based on various invertebrates and vertebrates. Gregarious, they like to breed in huge colonies (for details on the breeding ecology and ethology (see Cramp & Simmons, 1982; Isenmann, 1982). In the Mediterranean Basin, Goutner (1986a, 1986b and 1987) studied the breeding ecology and requirements of the species on the two present existing breeding sites in Greece. It breeds on undisturbed islets mainly in brackish or salty lagoons but also on offshore sandy islets and salines. The species needs a short grassy vegetation (halophytes and/or psammophiles) but open sandy grounds with wooden debris may also be used. Generally the laying period occurs in May (some early eggs can be laid at the end of April) and the chicks are reared from June to the end of July. Their diet mainly consists of insects but also fish. They probably depend on specific yearly prey abundance over the feeding habitats extending from the sea to the cultivated areas. The breeding success of the species is sensitive to food availability, predator pressures, human disturbances and pesticides. This species mainly winters in offshore waters of the western Mediterranean Basin where it fishes and/or follows trawlers, but coastal inland habitats are also used (Cramp & Simmons, 1982; Isenmann, 1982).

III. CONSERVATION

The conservation conditions and potential threats for Greece, Italy and France are summarized in Table 1. In France and Italy the status of this gull does not seem to be threatened at the moment. The most vulnerable breeding sites appear to be the existing colonies in Greece. The recent drainage of the Drana lagoon in the Evros delta in 1987 proved this. Industrial, agricultural, fishing and touristic projects severely narrowed the chance of maintaining the last existing natural lagoons. For the conservation of the Mediterranean Gull within the Mediterranean Basin the following actions should be of special importance:

1. To secure the existing breeding sites, especially in Greece. Local conservation efforts must be supported by the European Communities.
2. To continue collecting data on the fluctuations of the species population during breeding time as well as wintering time. Factors which should be considered are mainly shooting and contamination by pesticides. The latter should also be studied on the breeding colonies where its impact on breeding success could be evaluated.
3. Close collaboration is needed with scientists in the Soviet Union to exchange information on breeding population trends.

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GOUTNER, V. e ISENMANN, P. Estatus reproductor de la Gaviota cabecinegra (*Larus melanocephalus*) en la cuenca del Mediterráneo.

RESUMEN

El área de cría de la Gaviota cabecinegra se concentra sobre todo en islotes costeros de la zona noroeste del Mar Negro (Ucrania, Unión Soviética), donde cría más del 97% de la población mundial. La especie también nidifica en Grecia (en los últimos años en la laguna de Alyki y en el delta del Evros) y en Turquía (lagos de Anatolia). Recientemente se ha extendido a Italia ("Valli" de Comacchio y de Bertuzzi, ambos en Ravenna) y al sur de Francia (Camargue). Su cría ha sido detectada por primera vez en España (Delta del Ebro). Además, cada año hay observaciones de cría de algunas parejas solitarias en varios países de Europa. En este artículo se hace un repaso general de las fluctuaciones recientes de la población en la cuenca del Mediterráneo con comentarios sobre sus hábitats y sus problemas de conservación.

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