

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AXIOS-LOUDIAS-ALIAKMONAS WETLAND COMPLEX FOR NESTING OF THREATENED SPECIES OF GULLS AND TERNS

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Several protected species of gulls and terns have undergone severe breeding population declines in Greece. Sandwich tern *Sterna sandwicensis*, Gull-billed tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* and Slender-billed gull *Larus genei* are all listed as Vulnerable species in the Greek Red Data Book while Mediterranean gull *Larus melanocephalus* is listed as Endangered. All four species are known to breed in no more than 1 - 5 wetlands in Greece. Recent surveys by boat in the islets of Aliakmonas Delta (Thermaikos Gulf), have revealed the existence of larger breeding populations from the ones known so far. The colony of Slender-billed gull, the only known in Greece, numbers approximately 260 pairs compared to the known size of 100 - 130 pairs. The colonies of Sandwich tern, Gull-billed tern and Mediterranean gull were counted to have 532, 380 and 1175 pairs respectively, where as the total known population for these species in Greece was 30 – 50, 180 – 270 and max. 1950 pairs, respectively. Our findings for Sandwich tern and Gull-billed tern are well over the known total breeding population for these species in Greece. The Mediterranean gull colony at Aliakmon with another one at the Axios delta represents >90 % of the total Greek breeding population. The systematic monitoring of nesting populations of the aforementioned species of gulls and terns in the Axios-Loudias-Aliakmonas wetland complex could contribute essentially to their conservation.