

THE PRESPA LAKES AS A WINTERING SITE FOR WATERBIRDS: RESULTS OF 25 YEARS OF UNINTERRUPTED MONITORING

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The Prespa lakes are shared by Greece, Albania and the FYR of Macedonia and although situated at high altitudes and with very low temperatures in winter, do host important numbers of wintering waterbirds. Those wintering at the Greek part were counted each January for the last 25 years within the framework of the International Midwinter Waterfowl Census. The average number of wintering waterbirds were 10,138 (range 3,676 to 19,431). No significant increasing or decreasing trends were observed, but numbers varied much more in 1988-2000 than in 2001-2012, a fact attributed to the consistently milder successive winters of the latter period. Birds move from one lake to the other according to environmental conditions, but Mikri Prespa hosted on the average low numbers of birds (1,153, range 0-3,936) as it was frequently covered partly or entirely with ice. Bird species regularly occurring in winter were 30, while 5 more were observed rarely. The six more common species were *Podiceps cristatus*, *Fulica atra*, *Aythya fuligula*, *Larus ridibundus*, *Podiceps nigricollis* and *Aythya ferina*. The three first make up on the average more than 87% of all wintering birds. Because counting birds separately in each one of the littoral countries may compromise the conclusions that can be drawn from the results, between 2010 and 2012 counts were fully synchronised to give unbiased estimations of the birds present on the entire area of the lakes. Total numbers of wintering birds present in the lakes for this period ranged from 35,368-45,415, and were strongly dominated by *Fulica atra*.