

Received: 21.10.2023.

Accepted: 28.11.2023.

## FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF THE MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus* IN CROATIA

*Prvo zabilježeno gniježđenje crnoglavog galeba *Larus melanocephalus* u Hrvatskoj*

**DOMAGOJ TOMIČIĆ<sup>1</sup>, JOSIP LEDIŠČAK<sup>2</sup>, ADRIAN TOMIK<sup>3</sup>, LUKA JURINOVIĆ<sup>4</sup>,  
BILJANA JEČMENICA<sup>4</sup>, DORA DVORŽAK LEDIŠČAK<sup>2</sup>, SANDRA HODIĆ<sup>6</sup>, VLATKA  
DUMBOVIĆ MAZAL<sup>6</sup>, KREŠIMIR MIKULIĆ<sup>7</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Kupina 45, Kupina, 35221 Velika Kопanica, Croatia

<sup>2</sup>Vatroslava Lisinskog 3, 31500 Našice, Croatia

<sup>3</sup>I.Meštrovića 74, 31326 Darda, Croatia

<sup>4</sup>Croatian Veterinary Institute, Poultry Center, Heinzelova 55,  
10000 Zagreb, Croatia

<sup>5</sup>Đure Basaričeka 141, 48350 Đurđevac, Croatia

<sup>6</sup>Zavod za zaštitu okoliša i prirode Ministarstva gospodarstva i održivog  
razvoja, Radnička 80, 10000 Zagreb

<sup>7</sup>IBIS program d.o.o., Dominika Andrijaševića 7, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia

The Mediterranean gull, *Larus melanocephalus*, is a medium-sized West Palearctic gull. Its main breeding grounds are in the Black Sea region with a fragmented population in the rest of Europe since the 1940s when the westward expansion began. It nests along coasts and lagoons with sparse vegetation and generally avoids barren sand (OLSEN & LARSSON 2003). In Central and Western Europe they often breed in mixed colonies with Black-headed Gulls, *Larus ridibundus*, on small islands with short vegetation (GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM & BAUER 1999). In Croatia, it is a regular passage bird, present from July to October and April to June (JURINOVIĆ 2013). The nearest breeding populations are in Hungary (since 1940), Serbia, Vojvodina (since 1986) (GERGELJ *et al.* 2005) and Slovenia (since 2007) (DENAC & Božič 2009). It is migratory, wintering mainly in the Mediterranean and along the Atlantic coast of North Africa (JURINOVIĆ 2013).

After the reconstruction of Kravlje pond in Našice fishponds (Slavonia, eastern Croatia), which lasted from autumn 2022 to the beginning of spring 2023, a small island was created that remained dry even during the highest water level in the pond (Figure 1). The islet is a favourable habitat for many migratory

e-mail: domagoj.tomicic97@gmail.com

birds to rest, as well as for breeding birds that nest on the ground on islands. As part of the monitoring of wetland birds on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023, courtship behaviour and the potential formation of a mixed breeding colony of Black-headed Gulls, Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, Pied Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* and Mediterranean Gulls was observed. In total, 17 Mediterranean Gulls (15 subadults in its third calendar year and two adults) were observed on the islet. Given that the islet quickly overgrew in short vegetation during May, it was not possible to determine the presence of Mediterranean Gull nests from the shore. Therefore, on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023, the islet was photographed by an unmanned aerial vehicle (drone), which confirmed at least two active nests of Mediterranean Gulls (Figure 2). In addition, about 70 nesting pairs of Black-headed Gulls, 15 pairs of Black-winged Stilts and three pairs of Pied Avocets were found on the island. The ringing on 21<sup>st</sup> June did not confirm the breeding success (i.e. fledged chicks) of Mediterranean Gulls nesting at Našice fishponds. A possible reason is that the majority of nesting individuals were in their third calendar year of life, and it was shown that birds at that age have a lower nesting success than older individuals (DIES J. & DIES B. 2004). Also, it is possible that eggs (if present) were still incubated, since, e.g. in Hungary, the Mediterranean Gulls often start breeding a few weeks later than the Black-headed Gulls (Peter Szinai pers. comm.)

This finding puts the Mediterranean Gull on the list of breeding species for Croatia. In order to ensure and maintain favourable breeding conditions for the Mediterranean Gulls and the other species of the mixed colony, the growth of woody vegetation on the islet should be prevented by regular mowing before the breeding season. Additionally, the pond needs to be filled completely with water during the entire breeding season. It would be a good practice to create or leave out similar small islands during future fishponds reconstructions.



**Figure 1:** The newly formed islet on Našice fishponds (photo: Josip Ledinščak).  
*Slika 1:* Novonastali otočić na ribnjacima Našice (fotografija: Josip Ledinščak).



**Figure 2.** The observed Mediterranean Gulls nests surrounded by short vegetation located in mixed breeding colony on a small island on Našice fishponds (photo: Josip Ledinščak)  
*Slika 2.* Zabilježena/uočena gnijezda crnoglavih galebova u mješovitoj koloniji ptica močvarica, na zemljanom otoku okružena niskom vegetacijom, na ribnjacima Našice (fotografija: Josip Ledinščak)

## Acknowledgments

Field surveys that enabled the discovery of the nesting of the Mediterranean Gull in Croatia were conducted within the implementation of the project “Development of a Monitoring System for the Species and Habitat Types” of the Institute for Environment and Nature of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Croatia, co-financed by the European Union under the Operational Program Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014 - 2020.

## References

- DENAC, D., BOŽIČ, L. (2009): Breeding of the Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* in Slovenia. *Annales Ser.hist.nat.* 19: 17–24.
- DIES J.I., DIES, B. (2004): The breeding biology of Mediterranean Gull at l'Albufera de Valencia (Western Mediterranean). *Ardeola* 51: 221–224.
- GERGELJ, J., ŽULJEVIĆ, A., SEKEREŠ, O. (2004): Dinamika brojnosti parova i migracija crnoglavog galeba *Larus melanocephalus* sa kolonije na Paličkom jezeru. *Ciconia* 13: 122-127.
- GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM, U. N., BAUER, K. M. (1999): *Handbuch von Vogel Mitteleuropas. Band 8/1. Charadriiformes (3. Teil).* AULA – Verlag, Wiesbaden.
- JURINOVIĆ, L. (2013): Crnoglavi galeb *Larus melanocephalus*. Pp. 103-104. in: KRALJ, J., BARIŠIĆ, S., ČIKOVIĆ, D., TUTIŠ, V. (eds): *Croatian Bird Migration Atlas.* Croatian Academy of Science and Arts. Zagreb, Croatia.
- OLSEN, K., M., LARSSON, H. (2004): *Gulls of North America, Europe and Asia.* Princeton University Press. Princeton and Oxford.

## SAŽETAK

Prvo gniježđenje crnoglavog galeba *Larus melanocephalus* u Hrvatskoj zabilježeno je tijekom proljeća 2023. godine u Slavoniji (istočna Hrvatska). Najmanje dva aktivna gnijezda zabilježena su dron letjelicom u miješanoj koloniji riječnih galebova *Larus ridibundus*, vlastelica *Himantopus himantopus* i modronogih sabljarki *Recurvirostra avosetta* na malenom otočiću na šaranskim ribnjacima Našice. Tijekom naknadnog obilaska otočića s ciljem prstenovanja ptici crnoglavog galeba nisu zabilježeni.