

THE ACTUAL STATUS OF SLENDER-BILLED GULL *Larus genei* ON THE SOUTHERN DALMATIAN COAST

Status zalivskega galeba *Larus genei* na južnodalmatinski obali

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The Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* inhabits a discontinuous breeding range from the inland seas of Central Asia to the Caspian and Black Sea area. In the western parts of its range the species breeds more locally throughout the Mediterranean, southwards to the W. African coast in Mauretania and Senegambia. Whereas southern populations are largely resident, with limited dispersal, large numbers from the Black Sea area winter in the E. Mediterranean northwards to the Ionian Sea off W. Greece, the Strait of Otranto and S. Albania (CRAMP 1983, HANDRINOS & AKRIOTIS 1997). Since the 1960s, in the course of an overall increase of eastern populations, the species established new breeding colonies in Sardinia, S. France and S. Spain (SEREBRYAKOV & ZUBAKIN 1997) as well as in Valli di Comacchio (since 1978), Valle Bertuzzi (1987) and Margherita di Savoia (1988) on the Italian side of the Adriatic Sea (BOLDREGHINI *et al.* 1989, FASOLA & BRICHETTI 1993).

Despite its status as an established breeder away from its immediate nesting areas, Slender-billed Gulls are recorded only occasionally throughout the N. and E. Adriatic. Since 1945, there have been only 2 accepted records for Slovenia, with a total of 2 birds – April 11th 1990 in Hotinja vas (VOGRIN 1990), and

March 10th – April 7th 1991 in Sečoveljske soline (JANČAR & KMECL 1992, BOŽIČ 2001). In other republics of former Yugoslavia, SAGE (1966) recorded the species in 1964 on Lake Prespa in S. Macedonia. In Croatia, according to I. TUTMAN, two Slender-billed Gulls were killed during the 1970s in the surroundings of Dubrovnik (KRALJ 1997). Although one of these birds is said to be preserved in the ornithological collection of the Dubrovnik Museum, neither origin nor date of collection for the specimen is documented (KRALJ 1997, LUKAČ & BALIČ 2001). Nevertheless, based on this record, LUKAČ (1998) included Slender-billed Gull in his most recent list of Croatian birds, as a rare visitor for the region.

During about 10 ornithological excursions to the S. Dalmatian coast since 1997 we saw the species on five occasions in the estuary of the Neretva river, near the harbour of Ploče (Neretva delta). The bird faunas of the lower Neretva were studied intensively, by long-term recording and collecting, by RUCNER (1993) in the last century. In contrast to RUCNER, who does not mention the species for the area, we could record the species repeatedly in the delta since the late 1990s (Table 1). During our first observation in 1997 and again in late April 2001, we managed to take a series

Table 1 Observations of Slender-billed Gulls *Larus genei* in the Neretva estuary between 1997 and 2002

Tabela 1: Opazovanja zalivskega galeba Gulls *Larus* v delti Neretve med letoma 1997 in 2000

Date / Datum	No. of individuals / Št. osebkov	Age / Starost	Observers / Opazovalci
October 2 nd 1997	1	ad. winter	B. Rubinič
April 29 th 1998	6	ad. summer	B. Rubinič
May 1 st 1998	5	ad. summer	B. Rubinič
April 27 th 2001	4	ad. summer	L. Božič, P. Sackl
May 5 th 2002	2	ad. summer	B. Rubinič



Figure 1: Adult winter Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* resting on the water in the estuary of the Neretva river, S Dalmatia (Croatia), October 2nd 1997 (photo: B. Rubinič)

Slika 1: Odrasel zalivski galeb *Larus genei* v zimskem perju počiva na vodi v ustju reke Neretve, južna Dalmacija, 2.10.1997 (foto: B. Rubinič)

of photographs of the birds resting in the delta near the coast line at low tide (Figure 1 & Colour appendix – Figure 1). On almost all occasions, Slender-billed Gulls apparently stayed together, congregating while resting or feeding with Black-headed *Larus ridibundus*, Yellow-legged *L. cachinnans* and Mediterranean Gulls *L. melanocephalus*, as well as small numbers of Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandvicensis*, on tidal mudflats and on low sandbanks along, or immediately off, the coast line. Furthermore, during migration, mixed flocks of waders fed or rested in close association with the Slender-billed Gulls.

Our observations from the Neretva delta fit well into the period of the main autumn (July – October) and return passages (March – early May) of the species in the E. and central Mediterranean (CRAMP 1983, FLINT & STEWART 1983, IAPICHINO & STEWART 1989, HADRINOS & AKRIOTIS 1997). It is not possible to decide, without further evidence, whether the birds we recorded on the lower Neretva since 1997 belong to breeding colonies on the Italian side of the Adriatic or if they constitute a fraction of vagrant migrants entering the N. Adriatic Sea outside the breeding season. Nevertheless, according to the very limited evidence for the occurrence of Slender-billed Gulls in the Neretva estuary (RUCNER 1993) and elsewhere along the E Adriatic coast from the late 19th to 20th centuries (REISER & FÜHRER 1896, REISER 1939,

MATVEJEV & VASIĆ 1973), the species appears to occur at present mainly as a rare visitor. Thus, our local results correspond quite well with recent increases of eastern populations (HEATH *et al.* 2000). The species has established new breeding colonies in the W. Mediterranean, on the Italian coast of the Adriatic (approx. 1050 and 775 pairs in 1998 and 1999, respectively (F. PERCO *in lit.*)), and is recorded more frequently in inland S. and W. Europe (SEREBRYAKOV & ZUBAKIN 1997, SCHMID *et al.* 2001).

Summary

The occurrence of Slender-billed Gulls *Larus genei* in Croatia was known by only a single record from the S Dalmatian coast. We report five new observations of the species for the area, in the estuary of the Neretva river near Ploče between 1997 – 2002. We document our observations by photographs taken in the estuary in October 1997 and April 2001. In the course of long-term investigations during the last century on the birds of the lower Neretva, the species was not recorded. Thus, the more frequent occurrence of the species as a rare migrant in the area during the late 1990s is apparently related to an overall increase of population numbers and the establishment of new breeding colonies on the Italian side of the Adriatic Sea.

Povzetek

Pojavljanje zalivskega galeba *Larus genei* na Hrvaškem je bilo znano le prek edinega podatka z južnodalmatinske obale. Navajamo pet novih opazovanj vrste za to območje za izlivnega dela Neretve blizu mesta Ploče med letoma 1997 in 2002, dokumentirana s fotografijami, posnetimi na ustju Neretve oktobra 1997 in aprila 2001 (slika 1 & barvna priloga – slika 1). V času raziskav ptic spodnje Neretve zalivski galeb v teku 20. stoletja ni bil opazovan. Iz tega sklepamo, da je rednejše pojavljanje vrste kot redke selivke na tem območju v času poznih 90-ih let prejšnjega stoletja povezano s splošnim povečanjem številčnosti populacij in pojavom novih gnezditvenih kolonij na italijanski strani Jadrana.

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barvna priloga / colour appendix



Figure 1: Slender-billed Gulls *Larus genei* resting together with Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus* and Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandvicensis* on low sandbanks in the Neretva estuary during low tide, April 27th 2001 (photo: P.Sackl) – see page 36

Slika 1: Počivajoči zalivski galebi *Larus genei* v družbi rečnih galebov *L. ridibundus* in kričavih čiger *Sterna sandvicensis* na polojih v ustju reke Nertve med oseko, 27.4.2001 (foto: P. Sackl) – glej str. 36



Slika 2: Turška kotorna *Alectoris chukar*, hrib Marijin Vijenac nad delto Neretve (J Dalmacija), 30.4.2001 (foto: J. Smole) – glej str. 56

Figure2: Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar*, Marijin Vijenac hill over the Neretva delta (S Dalmatia), April 30th 2001 (photo: J. Smole) – see page 56