

Short communications

Breeding populations of gulls and terns in northern Egypt

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The status of seabirds in Egypt has relatively recently been summarized by Meininger and Baha el Din (1986) and by Goodman and Meininger (1989). However, new data on the breeding populations of gulls and terns in northern Egypt justify an update of previous estimates. Most data were collected during extensive field work in northern Egypt between early March and mid-June 1990 (Meininger and Atta in prep.), at Lake Manzala, in the northeastern Nile Delta, and Suez Bay. Additional visits were paid to El Malaha and Lake Bardawil in northern Sinai, to Wadi el Natrun and Lake Qarun in the Western Desert of Egypt, and to Lake Burullus (the latter area in spring 1992). Four species of gulls and terns breed in northern Egypt.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* - On 26 May 1990, 5688 nests were counted, and 143 chicks ringed, in a breeding colony at El Malaha, just east of Port Said. Four sub-colonies could be distinguished, all situated on small earth islands resulting from canal digging in the lagoon. The sub-colonies held 1650, 900, 3100, and 38 nests, respectively. The nests in the first two sub-colonies contained many small chicks, the latter two held no chicks at all, and there were many nests with only one or two eggs. These variable stages of breeding, and the presence of recently destroyed eggs and abandoned nests in the first sub-colony, suggested that the colony had been disturbed, presumably by local fishermen. Foraging flights of Slender-billed Gulls were mainly directed towards Lake Manzala. Based on regurgitations, Chironomid larvae seemed to be the most important food for the chicks.

El Malaha is the only known breeding site of Slender-billed Gull in Egypt, where breeding has been known since 1938 (Goodman and Meininger 1989). 200 nests were found in this area in 1979 (Meininger and Mullié 1981), and 2000 adults on 4

July 1986, including concentrations of several hundred birds on islands, during an aerial survey (Goodman and Meininger 1989). The 1990 survey suggests that a considerable increase has occurred. This is the largest known breeding population of Slender-billed Gull in the Mediterranean Sea. Fasola (1986) estimated the total breeding population in the Mediterranean Sea (excluding Egypt) at 5200 pairs, and the total population in the Western Palearctic at over 30 000 pairs (mainly in the Black Sea).

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* - The only known Egyptian breeding site of this species is situated in a lagoon east of El Alamein. Apparent breeding of a few pairs was noted here in 1982, in 1985 a colony of 10-15 pairs was found at this site, and in 1986 this colony held 25 pairs (Goodman and Meininger 1989). No signs of breeding were noted in any of the areas visited in spring 1990.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* - Hitherto, Common Terns were only known from Egypt as passage visitors and as non-breeding summer visitors. On 26 May 1990 a nest with two eggs was photographed and 11 alarming adults observed at El Malaha, suggesting at least five breeding pairs. The nest was situated in the periphery of the Slender-billed Gull colony. This is the first known breeding of Common Tern in Egypt (Goodman and Meininger 1989).

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* - A previous estimate of the total Egyptian breeding population of Little Tern was 2000 pairs, of which 1000 pairs in the Nile Delta and 800-1200 pairs in northern Sinai (Goodman and Meininger 1989).

Observations in Lake Manzala in spring 1990 suggested a breeding population of 1200-1500 pairs in this lake alone. At El Malaha 60-100 pairs were found breeding near the colony of Slender-billed

Gull on 26 May 1990, including some with newly hatched chicks. On the same date 20-50 pairs were found at Port Fuad. In the mid-1980s the breeding population at Lake Bardawil was estimated at 800-1200 pairs (Dunnet *et al.* 1986, Meininger and Baha el Din 1986). On a dike in the fishponds in Abuksa Bay, Lake Qarun, 64 scrapes and 25 nests with eggs were found on 15 May 1990; at least 85 adults were present. The total population at Lake Qarun was estimated at 100-150 pairs. Over 500 pairs of Little Terns were found during a survey of the southern part of Lake Burullus during 29 May-2 June 1992 (G.A.M.A. and George Wintermans). Several hundreds of pairs probably breed in other parts of this lake, resulting in a total estimate of 600-800 pairs. Some 50-100 pairs are believed to breed at Lake Maryut, while the species is probably absent from Lake Idku (Meininger *et al.* 1986). About 55 birds were seen in Lake Nasser near Abu Simbil, in the extreme south of Egypt, on 10 July 1990. On 17 June 1990, Baha el Din and Baha el Din (1990) found six pairs of breeding Little Terns, "perhaps *S. a. guinea*" on a low sandy island to the north of Abu Simbil.

Although Little Terns have a low site fidelity, and the estimate is based on censuses in different years, a conservative estimate of the total Egyptian breeding population is 2900-3800 pairs.

Fasola (1986) estimated the total Western Palearctic population at 20 000 pairs, of which 10 600 in the Mediterranean Sea (including 2000 pairs in Egypt). It is clear that Egypt holds a significant proportion of this population.

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Riassunto — Vengono forniti dati relativi al Gabbiano roseo *Larus genei*, al Gabbiano reale *Larus cachinnans*, alla Sterna comune *Sterna hirundo* ed al Fraticello *Sterna albifrons* nidificanti nell'Egitto settentrionale.

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