

SPECIES INFORMATION SHEET

Larus melanocephalus

English name: Mediterranean gull	Scientific name: <i>Larus melanocephalus</i>
Taxonomical group: Class: Aves Order: Charadriiformes Family: Laridae	Species authority: Temminck, 1820
Subspecies, Variations, Synonyms: –	Generation length: 6 years
Past and current threats (Habitats Directive article 17 codes): Random threat factors (–), Alien species (I01), Competition and predation (I02)	Future threats (Habitats Directive article 17 codes): Random threat factors (–), Alien species (I01), Competition and predation (I02)
IUCN Criteria: D1	HELCOM Red List Category: EN Endangered
Global / European IUCN Red List Category (BirdLife International 2004) LC / LC	Annex I EU Birds Directive yes Annex II EU Birds Directive no
Protection and Red List status in HELCOM countries: <i>Subject of special conservation measures in the EU Member states (Birds Directive, Annex I)</i> Denmark: NA, Estonia: NA, Finland: –, Germany: * (Not threatened), Latvia: –, Lithuania: –, Poland – /–, Russia: –, Sweden: –	

Range description and general trends

The Mediterranean gull has a widespread, but patchy distribution in Europe. The range of the species is almost restricted to this continent, but it expands also to central Turkey. The total population is large (>120 000 bp) and increased during 1970–1990, in much of its range also during 1990–2000. The main breeding areas are the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (BirdLife International 2004). During the 20th century, the species expanded its range. Since 1970, it is a regular breeder in The Netherlands and Belgium with increasing population numbers (Meininger & Flamant 1998). Around 2000, the western European population (France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, and UK) counted already almost 5,000 bp (BirdLife International 2004). The colonization of the Baltic started in 1951, when the first breeding of a Mediterranean gull was recorded on the island Langenwerder, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.



Larus melanocephalus.
Photo by Mathias Putze.

Distribution and status in the Baltic Sea region

The Mediterranean gull has expanded its range to the Baltic Sea area during the second half of the 20th century. It colonized Denmark, Germany and Poland, and bred in single cases in Sweden and Estonia. The population increased slowly, but remained small with still < 100 bp.

In **Sweden**, several breeding or breeding attempts with black-headed gull and common gull colonies

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have been recorded since the mid-1990s. However, genuine breeding or breeding attempts could not be confirmed before 2008. In 2008, there was a breeding attempt in Malmö; in 2010, 2 pairs bred successfully in Blekinge (Sölvesborg); in 2011, there were two breeding attempts, one in Blekinge and one in Västergötland (Vänersborgsviken). The species is obviously immigrating into Sweden, but it cannot yet be considered as an established breeder.

In **Estonia**, two breeding records have been recorded: 1962 one nest with 2 eggs on the islet of Kuralaid (Oriku group of islands), and 1967 one nest with 1 egg on the same islet.

In **Poland**, until 1980 the Mediterranean gull was only known as a rare visitor. It started breeding in 1981. During the 1990s, it colonized both coastal and inland breeding sites (Tomiałojć & Stawarczyk 2003). The main breeding sites are found along large rivers, where the birds nest on islets with sparse vegetation. In coastal areas, breeding has been confirmed near Elbląg, Gdynia and Swinoujście. The total population in 2000–2005 was 18–30 confirmed breeding pairs, but 28–54 bp if probable breeding is included (Sikora *et al.* 2007).

At the **German** Baltic coast of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the first breeding of the Mediterranean gull was recorded in 1951, when a male *Larus melanocephalus* bred with a female *Larus canus* on the island Langenwerder. Two years later a pair of *Larus melanocephalus* bred on the same island (Dost 1965). Starting in 1958, the species became a regular breeding bird with fluctuating numbers of 1–10 bp, breeding on different coastal islands (Langenwerder, Heuwiese, Kirr, Barther Oie and others). During the last 5 years (2007–2011) the number of breeding pairs was 3–9.

In Schleswig-Holstein, the first breeding attempts have been recorded in 1965 on the coastal islands Graswarder and Oehe/Schleimünde. Since 1969 the Mediterranean gull is breeding on inland lakes. Since the end of the 1990s, it also breeds at the North Sea coast. The total population in the eastern (Baltic) parts of Schleswig-Holstein fluctuates between 8 and 12 bp (numbers 2007–2011). The main permanent breeding sites are the Nature Reserve Graswarder and some inland gull colonies in the lake area near Plön (Berndt *et al.* 2002). In recent times, the species also has bred on roofs of the city of Kiel and the sea resort Weißenhäuser Strand.

In **Denmark**, the Mediterranean gull breeds both at the North Sea and Baltic Sea coasts. The first breeding took place in 1970 on the island Enø in the Baltic. Until 1999, *Larus melanocephalus* was only an occasional breeder in the Danish Baltic. Since then it has established as a regular breeder in low numbers (Olsen 1992, Hansen 2004). A maximum of 16 pairs was recorded in 2006 (Hansen 2007), and in 2010 9–10 pairs were found (Hansen 2011).

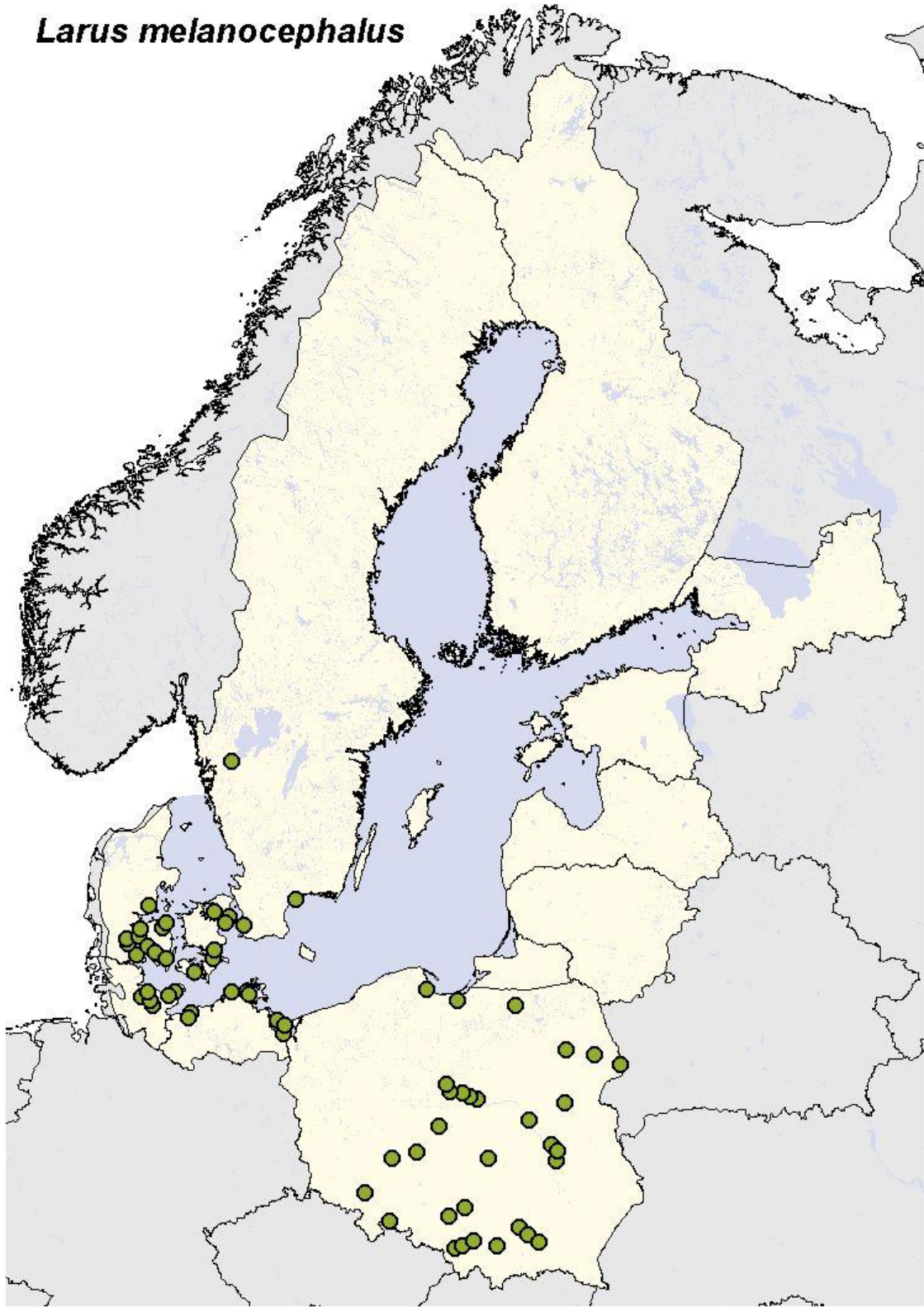
Table 1: Population numbers of the Mediterranean gull *Larus melanocephalus* in the Baltic Sea area. For population trends 0=stable, +=increasing.

Country	Population size		Short-term population trend (10 years)	Long-term population trend (50 years)
	Breeding pairs	year		
Sweden	2	2010–2011	+	
Estonia	Exceptional breeding bird	1962 and 1967		
Poland	28–54	2000–2005	+	+
Germany - MV	3–9	2007–2011	0	+
Germany - SH	8–12	2007–2011	0	+
Denmark	7–16	2006–2010	+	+
Baltic Sea	50–95			

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Distribution map

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Habitat and ecology

Larus melanocephalus breeds on coastal bird islands, usually within colonies of black-headed gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) or common gulls (*Larus canus*). Inland breeding places are found on islands with gull colonies on lakes, on river islets with sparse vegetation or at reservoirs. The Baltic population is migratory. Ringing recoveries of birds ringed in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania reveal the British islands and the coasts of the British Channel being the main wintering area (Heinicke 2009, unpublished). Birds ringed in the Netherlands and Belgium have been recorded in the same area, but also along the Atlantic coasts of France, Spain, Portugal up to Morocco (Boldreghini *et al.* 1992). There is a movement of birds from the Black Sea to the Baltic, as it was shown by a bird which has hatched 1975 at the Ukrainian Black Sea coast and bred 1978 in the Wismar Bight/ Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. Birds from the Mediterranean Sea have been found to establish as breeders in north-western Europe (Boldreghini *et al.* 1992).

Description of major threats

The population of the Mediterranean gull in the Baltic Sea area is stable to slowly increasing on a low level. The number of breeding sites is limited. Hence, the species is vulnerable to random threat factors (RTF). Furthermore, the problem of predation by non-native and native predators exists also for *Larus melanocephalus*.

Assessment justification

The species is classified, according to the small population size (<250 mature individuals), as *Endangered* (EN) (criterion D1).

Recommendations for actions to conserve the species

Conservation measures have to focus on the breeding places, which are usually colonies of *L. ridibundus* or *L. canus* on small islands. An appropriate grazing regime to prevent overgrowth and control of predatory mammals are the main actions to be taken.

Common names

Denmark: Sorthovedet måge, Estonia: Karbuskajakas, Finland: Mustanmerenlokki, Germany: Schwarzkopfmöwe, Latvia: Melngalvas kaija, Lithuania: Juodagalvis kiras, Poland: Mewa czarnogłowa, Russia: Черноголовая чайка, Sweden: Svarthuvad mås

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