

ESTATUS Y CONSERVACIÓN DE AVES MARINAS

ECOGEOGRAFIA Y PLAN DE ACCION PARA EL MEDITERRANEO

STATUS AND CONSERVATION OF SEABIRDS

ECOGEOGRAPHY AND MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

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FLUCTUATION OF LARIDAE AND STERNIDAE POPULATIONS
IN THE VALLI DI COMACCHIO (North-East Italy)

by

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The Valli di Comacchio is a vast brackish area of 10,200 hectares which is one of the most important wetlands in Italy and also in Europe for the breeding of Laridae and Sternidae. Nine of the twelve Laridae and Sternidae species present in Italy breed regularly in this area.

It should be noted that the populations of this area have been regularly controlled thanks to censuses taken from 1977 up until today by the authors, using the same counting methods. This enables us to ascertain the immigration of species new to Italy (*Larus melanocephalus*, *Sterna sandvicensis*, *Sterna bengalensis*) and to evaluate population trends during that period.

The populations have varied annually between 1,580 pairs in 1977 to 3,203 in 1988 while, in 1983, a maximum of 4,670 pairs was recorded.

Larus melanocephalus: 25 pairs immigrated in 1978, increasing to 197 pairs in 1982. The population subsequently fluctuated to reach a minimum of 48 pairs in 1988. This is probably correlated to the colonization of the neighbouring Valle Bertuzzi, where the population has gradually increased from 2 pairs in 1982 to 1,170 pairs in 1988.

Larus ridibundus: Recorded as breeding since 1960, the population of the Black-headed Gull increased considerably between 1980 and 1986 (from 115 pairs to 780), then decreased to 261 pairs in 1988.

Larus genei: 2 pairs immigrated in 1978, increasing gradually to 32 pairs in 1988.

Larus cachinnans: This species remained constant from 1977 to 1983 (150 to 168 pairs), yet has showed a marked increase during the past five years, almost doubling the 1984 population by 1988. If this trend continues, *Larus cachinnans* could become a serious threat to other breeding species.

Sterna nilotica: Recorded as breeding since the late 1940s, this species remained constant (60 to 72 pairs) between 1977 and 1981, fluctuating then between a minimum of 80 in 1984 to a maximum of 137 in 1987.

Sterna sandvicensis: 7 pairs immigrated in 1979. This is the only species to increase steadily, reaching 354 pairs in 1988. This is the only breeding population in Italy.

Sterna hirundo: Stable between 1977 and 1981, then fluctuating between 853 and 1,493 pairs, the Common Tern populations reached a maximum of 1,820 in 1986.

Sterna albifrons: Stable between 1977 and 1982 (800 to 950 pairs), then fluctuating considerably, reaching a maximum of 1,850 pairs in 1983 and a minimum of 470 in 1988.

Species	Comacchio Wetlands 1984 (pairs)	% Italy 1984	% Mediterranean	% W. Palearctic
L.m.	157	61.0	4.10	0.140
L.r.	467	60.0	3.30	0.050
L.g.	13	1.4	0.02	0.004
L.c.	230	0.9	0.30	0.030
S.n.	80	40.0	3.80	2.000
S.s.	149	100.0	16.20	0.100
S.h.	1513	33.0	7.40	1.100
S.a.	950	16.0	9.00	4.700

Table 1: Total breeding populations of Laridae and Sternidae in the Valli di Comacchio in 1984 and the abundance percentage relative to Italian, Mediterranean and Palearctic populations

Years	1977	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86	'87	'88
Pairs	1580	1711	1739	1850	2263	2573	4670	3559	2895	4588	4292	3203
Species	5	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9

Table 2: Number of pairs and of species breeding in the Valli di Comacchio since 1977

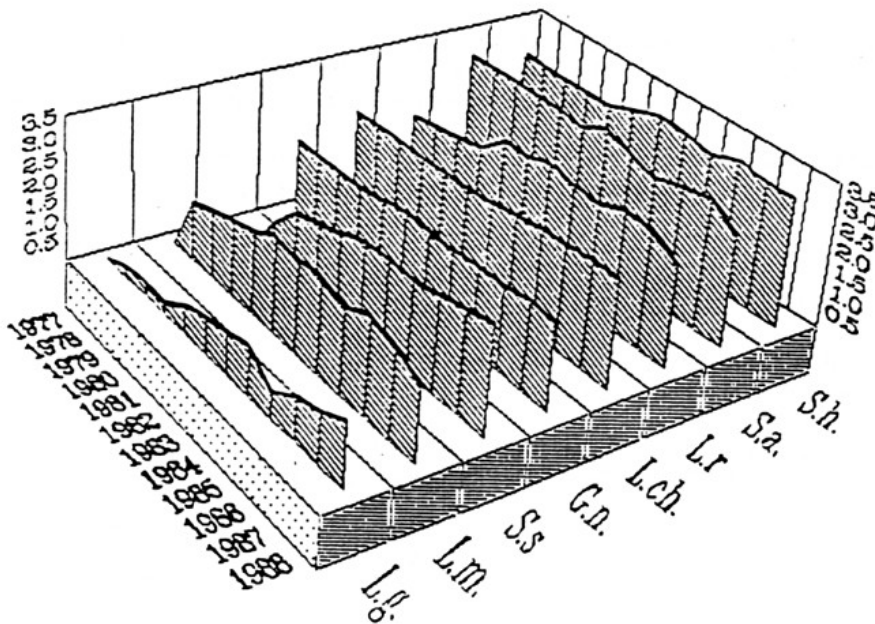


Figure 1: Population trends of the Laridae and Sternidae species breeding in the Valli di Comacchio (abundance expressed as decimal logarithms).