# On the nesting status of some seabirds in Djibouti

**by Mohammed Shobrak**

**Abstract.** During a survey of sea birds on the islands off Djibouti in July 2002, nine species were found to be breeding. The islets associated with Musha and Maskali islands showed more diversity in numbers and species than Les Sept Frères islands. The endemic White-eyed Gull was more abundant on these islets, with 84.4% of the total number recorded. By contrast, there were more Sooty Gulls on Les Sept Frères islands than on the islets associated with Musha and Maskali islands. The Brown Booby was observed breeding only on the cliffs of Les Sept Frères islands. Terns had just started to breed at the time of the survey and could therefore not be assessed completely. The breeding of White-cheeked Terns could be confirmed. The threats to the breeding colonies on the islands are discussed.

**Key words.** Africa, seabirds, avifauna, sea bird colonies.

## Introduction

There is only very limited information available on the breeding of seabirds in Djibouti. LAURENT (1987, 1990, 1993) recorded the breeding of Lesser Crested Terns, *Sterna bengalensis,* Swift Terns, *Sterna bergii,* and the Brown Booby, *Sula leucogaster*, at Les Sept Frères Islands located in the northern part of the country. At Mucha and Maskali Islands, he found breeding White-eye Gulls, *Larus hemprichii*, and Sooty Gulls, *L. leucophthalmus.* Other publications on the birds of Djibouti (e.g. WELCH & WELCH 1998, FISHPOOL & EVANS 2001) give only cursory information on the breeding of seabirds in the country. The *Regional Organization for the Conservation of Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden* (PERSGA) therefore funded a field survey of the islands of Djibouti to determine the breeding status of the true seabirds and to report on the threats that may affect them.

## Methods

The survey was carried out between 16 and 23 July 2002, during which period 14 of the offshore islands and islets off Djibouti were visited. Four methods were used: the vantage points, flush counts, walk-through counts, and quadrates. The vantage points were used at five cliff islands in the north (four islands at Les Sept Frères, and Musha island), in which the boat was used as the vantage point. The boat moved slowly around these islands counting the number of occupied nests by using binoculars. The flush count was used with nesting birds (usually those incubating or with small chicks), because when they are approached by a human they rise up reasonably synchronously and fly around above the colony in a relatively compact flock. This count was used especially for terns and gulls. Validation was calculated using BULLOCK & GOMERSALL (1981), who give a conversion factor of 1.5 for temperate nesting. This method was used commonly with the White-cheeked and Bridled Terns in the Arabian Gulf (SYMENS & AL-SUHAIBANI

Zoology in the Middle East 42, 2007: 59–65.
ISSN 0939-7140 © Kasparek Verlag, Heidelberg