

First survey of Audouin's Gull, *Larus audouinii* (Payraudeau, 1826), colonies at Kleidhes Islands, Cyprus

by Iris Charalambidou and Salih Gücel

Abstract. Breeding numbers of Audouin's Gulls were assessed during spring 2007 at Kasteletta and Zinaritou Islands, Kleidhes Islands, Cyprus. The colony on Kasteletta was small, holding six nests, and was abandoned early most probably because of the presence of a much larger Yellow-legged Gull colony on the same island. The colony on Zinaritou had 43 nests and a high breeding success, with nearly one fledgling per pair and 37% of chicks surviving (as a percentage of eggs laid). Low levels of interspecific competition with Yellow-legged Gulls, habitat suitability, protection from human disturbance and nearby trawling fishing activity probably contributed to the success of this colony.

Key words. Audouin's Gull, *Larus audouinii*, Yellow-legged Gull, *Larus michahellis*, breeding population, Kleidhes Islands, Cyprus

Introduction

Audouin's Gull, *Larus audouinii* Payraudeau, 1826, is endemic to the Mediterranean. Its population is estimated to be at least 19,000 pairs, with 90% concentrated in Spain, and the remainder scattered in small colonies throughout the Mediterranean (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2004). While the western Mediterranean metapopulation is relatively well known (ORO 2003), information from the eastern Mediterranean is incomplete, with known breeding populations in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus (ORO 1998). In Turkey, there is a colony at Aydıncık at a distance of 120 km from Cyprus (KASPAREK 1992). In Cyprus, breeding was first recorded in the 1960s on Kleidhes Islands (FLINT & STEWART 1990), but only a few scattered observations are available from the 1960s and 1970s, and only a single observation in the 1980s. We present here the first complete census of Audouin's Gull breeding population in Cyprus.

Methods

The Kleidhes Islands (35°42'N, 34°36'E) are a chain of six rocky islands situated off the north-east point of Cyprus (Fig. 1). The breeding of Audouin's Gull has been observed on two of these, Kasteletta and Zinaritou (FLINT & STEWART 1990). Kasteletta is situated 1.5 km from the mainland and is approximately 10 hectares in area. Zinaritou is separated from the mainland by 3 km and is about 2 hectares in area. From 31 March to 22 August 2007, Kasteletta was visited six times and Zinaritou eight times, with one, two or three-week periods between visits to limit disturbance to the gulls. In addition, a colony of the Yellow-legged Gull, *Larus michahellis* Naumann, 1840, on Kasteletta was surveyed on 31 March and 13 April, during the late laying and early incubation period, when most pairs had laid eggs but few broods had hatched (WANLESS & HARRIS 1984).