

OBSERVATIONS OF THE GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL IN BULGARIA

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Abstract. Until now 59 Great Black-backed Gulls have been recorded on the territory of Bulgaria, mainly during the seasonal migrations and in winter. They prefer the sea coast, seldom they visit the inland reservoirs. The first autumn migrants reach the Black Sea after September 6th. A new wave of migration is observed in December due to spell of cold weather in the northern wintering grounds. The birds leave for their breeding grounds in March and April. Non-breeding individuals remain on the Bulgarian reservoirs in summer. The territory of Bulgaria is a part of the wintering habitat of the species. Great Black-backed Gulls from the most eastern breeding grounds of the species migrate and winter in this country.

Key words: Great Black-backed Gull, Bulgaria, migration, wintering

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Наблюдения морской чайки в Болгарии. - Д.Н. Нанкинов. - Беркут. 9 (1-2). 2000. - До настоящего времени на территории Болгарии зарегистрированы 59 морских чаек, которые отмечались главным образом в период пролета и зимовки. Они задерживаются в основном на морском побережье, изредка проникая и на внутриконтинентальные водоемы. Первые осенние мигранты достигают болгарской акватории Черного моря после 6.09. Новая волна миграции отмечается в декабре, что объясняется похолоданием в районе более северных зимовок. Отлет птиц к своим гнездовьям происходит в марте-апреле. Неразмножающиеся особи остаются на болгарских водоемах и в летний период. Территорию Болгарии уже можно считать частью зимнего ареала данного вида. Здесь встречаются особи из наиболее восточных мест гнездования.

This big gull breeds along the seacoast (and the adjacent reservoirs) of the North Atlantic, between the Labrador peninsula and the Sea of Barents. To South it nests to France, as its main wintering grounds are in the Atlantic Ocean and the west part of the Mediterranean Sea (Dementiev, 1951). In 1983 we published in "Alauda" (France) information on the finding of the Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) in Bulgaria (Nankinov, Daraktchiev, 1983). Then our conclusions were that the species visits the territory of Bulgaria during all seasons of the years. One of the reasons for the preparation of the present article, besides the new data from the field studies, is the fact, that any information on the status of the Great Black-backed Gull in Bulgaria is absent in the monographs "The Birds of the Western Palearctic" (Cramp, Simmons, 1983; Snow, Perrins, 1998). During the last two decades this species has been met many times in Bulgaria and we can state that it regularly visits the country during its migrations.

It can be seen from the available literature that for the first time the Great Black-backed Gull was recorded in Bulgaria by W.

Radakoff (1879), during the winter in the vicinity of the town of Burgas. O. Reiser (1894) doubted this observation, but later H. Boettcher (1927, 1931) wrote that the Great Black-backed Gull "regularly visits the Bulgarian Black Sea coast" or that "accidentally it comes to the shores of the Black Sea".

Later on the observations of the species in Bulgaria are as follows.

1890 – April, G. Shumljanski shot 3 individuals near Varna. Their preparations are kept in the museum in the town of Ruse (Kovachev, 1894).

1926 – July 21st, it was observed several times on the Kaliakra Cape (Müller, 1927).

1976 – October 14th, 1 bird on Atanasovsko Lake by the town of Burgas (Roberts, 1978, 1980).

1979 – September 6th, 1 individual by the town of Tsarevo (S. Ivanov – pers. com.).

1981 – May 14th, an adult Great Black-backed Gull among a flock of moulting Herring Gulls (*L. cachinnans*) (Nankinov, Daraktchiev, 1983).

1987 – in April and May, G. Kotsakov (pers. com.) recorded about 10 birds along the

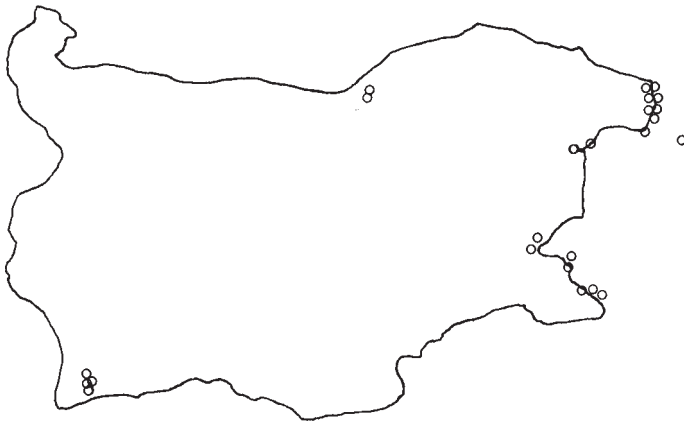


Fig. 1. Records of the Black-backed Gull in Bulgaria.

Рис. 1. Находки морской чайки в Болгарии.

seacoast by the town of Shabla.

– December 19th, O. Mladenov observed 5 adult and 7 second-year young birds among a flock of Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) and Herring Gulls in the fish-ponds by the village of Stalpishte, of Ruse.

1988 – February 2nd, a note arrived in the Bulgarian Ornithological Centre that on that day O. Mladenov trapped and ringed a Great Black-backed Gull (ring number Sofia 5-21687) in the fish-ponds by the village of Stalpishte, of Ruse.

– October 1st, the species is recorded as passage migrant along the Black Sea coast by Strandja mountain (Milchev, 1998).

1991 – September 15th, we observed 1+1+4 individuals among a concentration of about 2500 gulls: Mediterranean (*L. melanocephalus*), Black-headed, Herring and Slender-billed Gulls (*L. genei*) on the beach by Shabla Lake.

– September 17th, 1 bird among a flock of 800 gulls (Mediterranean and Herring Gulls) on the seashore of Durankulak Lake.

– September 19th, an adult bird came in the morning and alighted among a flock of other gulls on the beach by Durankulak Lake.

– December 26th, 1 individual was obser-

ved over the river Struma and the adjacent fish-ponds by the Ornithological station “Rupite” (A. Bachvarova, M. Veleva, K. Zareva, B. Nikolov, I. Hristov – pers. com.).

1992 – January 6th, an adult bird among a flock of Herring Gulls on an island in the river Struma, to the south of the Ornithological station “Rupite”, between the mouths of the rivers Strumeshnitsa and

Melnishka (B. Nikolov, I. Hristov – pers. com.).

– March 1st, again 1 individual was recorded by the Ornithological station “Rupite” (A. Bachvarova, M. Veleva, K. Zareva – pers. com.).

– April 10th, 1 bird was resting among a flock of 400 Herring Gulls on the beach by the Aquarium in Varna.

– April 12th, an adult bird flew parrallely to the ship in the open sea, to Northwest from the town of Varna.

1993 – September 20th, the species is recorded as passage migrant along the Black Sea coast by Strandja mountain (Milchev, 1998).

– December 29th, an adult individual together with 3 Herring Gulls and 3 Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) were observed on an island to the south from the Ornithological station “Rupite” (B. Nikolov, P. Shurulinkov – pers. com.).

1994 – July, an adult bird among a flock of Herring Gulls on the beach of camp “Arkutino” (A. Dutsov – pers. com.).

1995 – February 18th, an adult and a young bird found dead by Shabla Lake (van den Berg, Sangster, 1995).

1997 – January 11th and 12th: 1 individual was recorded on the seashore at 1 km from the village of Krapets (Northeast Bulgaria)



(B. Nikolov, K. Kiselova – pers. com.).

From the existing records of the Great Black-backed Gull in Bulgaria becomes clear that the species visits the Black Sea coast, as well as the inland of the country (Fig. 1). The observations with concrete numbers show that until now 59 Great Black-backed Gulls were recorded in Bulgaria, mainly in March and April – 26 individuals (45 %), December – 14 birds (24 %) and September – 9 birds (15 %) (Fig. 2). We can judge for the accomplishment of the migration

in Bulgaria by the existing information. The first autumn migrants from the North reach the Bulgarian Black Sea coast towards September 6th, but most of them arrive after September 15th. We assume that in December a new wave of migrating birds crosses Bulgaria, probably after a spell of cold weather in their northern wintering grounds. Part of this individuals spend the winter on our reservoirs. We can talk about spring migration and leaving of birds towards the northern nesting area in March and April, and the finding of Great Black-backed Gull in July is a proof for the summering of non-breeding individuals on Bulgarian reservoirs. There for the Great Black-backed Gull can be met in Bulgaria during the whole year, but most often during the seasonal migrations and in winter. The whole territory of the country (The Black Sea coast, as well as the inland reservoirs) is part of the wintering grounds of the species.

Our observations in the feeding places of this bird in Bulgaria reveal that it use rather varied food. It fishes in the sea, in the coastal lakes, in rivers with plenty of food and it especially prefers to visit the fish-ponds. Seldom it cleptoparasite when stealing fish from the other gulls. Probably there for it enters the concentrations of the Herring Gull, the Black-headed Gull, the Mediterranean Gull

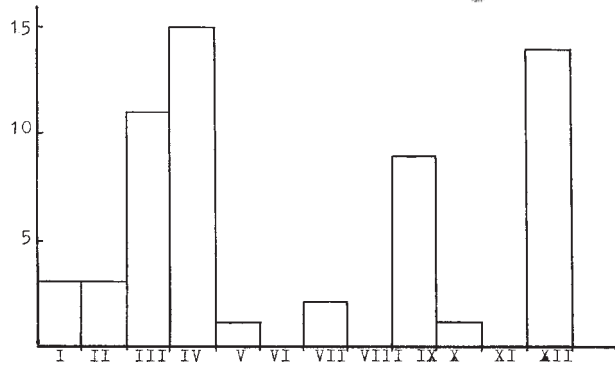


Fig. 2. Dynamics of observations of the Black-backed Gull in Bulgaria by months.

Рис. 2. Динамика наблюдений морской чайки в Болгарии по месяцам.

and the Slender-billed Gull, formed in bays and on the seashore. It pecks on carcasses and various food scraps, washed ashore. With this purpose it accompanies the ships in the open sea. Together with the other gulls it visits the cultivated areas, where there are colonies of the Common Vole (*Microtus arvalis*) and abundant large insects (leapers, beetles).

We can judge for the origin of the Great Black-backed Gulls, migrating and wintering in Bulgaria indirectly. We suppose that these are individuals from the most eastern nesting grounds of the species. The birds from the population of the White Sea winter mainly along the shores of North and Baltic Sea, and also in European Russia in Archangelsk and Kirov regions, in the Republic of Komi and Chuvashia (Tatarinkova, 1970). Probably in sudden cold spell some of the birds wintering along the Baltic Sea and in European Russia, migrate to south and appear on the west shore of the Black Sea. It is possible part of the Great Black-backed Gulls crossing the territory of Bulgaria to belong to the Baltic breeding population, which increased its number in the last decades. Only in Estonia for about 20 years it increased from 210 pairs in 1969 (Peedosaar, Onnju, 1970) to 2000 - 5000 pairs in 1991 (Snow, Perrins, 1998). A young individual ringed in Finland on 6.06.1965 was found on 13.12.1965 after 6 months and 7



days, in Croatia at 1800 km to Southwest from the breeding grounds (Stromar, 1968). Birds from the Finnish nesting areas have been found around Moscow and from the Swedish population – near Kaliningrad, in Belorussia and the Czech Republic (Cramp, Simmons, 1983).

The observations of the Great Black-backed Gull in Bulgaria show a characteristic feature of its biology, namely that it prefers the seashore (in Bulgaria – the Black Sea coast) during its migrations and wintering. Seldom it remains on inland reservoirs, far away from the seashore. In Bulgaria these are some observations on the river Struma by the Ornithological station “Rupite” and the fishponds by the village of Stalpishte, of Ruse.

In connection with the increasing of the population of the Great Black-backed Gull in its whole breeding habitat and especially along the shores of the White and the Baltic Seas (Judin, Firsova, 1988) we suppose that the species more often will visit the territory of Bulgaria in the future.

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