



Biodiversity in the Mediterranean Basin

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Marine Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Slovenia

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Conservation of marine biodiversity is essentially supported through the BirdLife International Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) Programme. Its aim is to identify, protect and manage a network of sites that are significant for the long-term viability of naturally occurring bird populations. Part of the Programme specifically addresses marine birds and their habitats. Compared to the terrestrial sites, marine areas have been undervalued until recently and few sites have been identified due to lack of hardly accessible population data.

The identification of marine IBAs in Slovenia is an ongoing process. In 2011 two near-shore sites (Debeli rtič, Strunjan) were added to the existing network and one site (Sečoveljske soline) was extended into marine environment. The entire delineated marine area covered six species of marine birds. This inclusion of marine environment to the network, however, was based solely on limited land observations.

Important progress has been made in the past three years within the scope of the project SIMARINE-NATURA (LIFE10NAT/SI/141). Marine IBAs have been identified based on systematic off-shore boat censuses and high-tech telemetry methods. The Mediterranean Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii*) was estimated to be the most likely qualifying species for the off-shore areas and was thus chosen as a target species in this research. Moreover, random observations of large floating congregations of Mediterranean Shags made by land observers were considered as an important additional data layer for the delineation of the areas.

One new area (Central Gulf of Trieste) and extensions of two existing marine IBAs (Strunjan, Debeli rtič) have been identified based on the results of the Mediterranean Shag survey. They cover 9389 ha of the Slovenian sea in total. The estimated numbers of Mediterranean Shags which use the newly delineated areas were 350-480, 300-330 and 140-300 individuals, respectively. The new marine IBAs will be proposed to be included into Natura 2000 network.