

# **Seabirds of the North East Mediterranean: Seabirds as Sentinels of Ecosystem Health**

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Seabirds are located at higher levels of marine food webs. Therefore, the distribution and abundance of seabird populations are important indicators of well-being of the marine ecosystems. North East Mediterranean Coast has high human activity like heavy industry and fisheries, whereas also hosts important environmental protection areas supporting regional biodiversity. Combination of those two contrasting features provides great opportunity to observe the effects of anthropogenic pressures on ecosystem health and biodiversity of the region. The anthropogenic pressures affecting seabird populations include habitat loss, plastic pollution, chemicals, discards and bycatch. The information obtained from long term monitoring of sea birds and marine ecosystem health is crucial to the development of more efficient strategies and policies for better management and protection of nature.

We conducted a breeding bird survey across north east Mediterranean coasts to understand the status of breeding seabird colonies in the region and the current pressures on their habitats. Preliminary results of our study reveal that habitat loss and degradation is a major threat to the coastal ecosystem of the region. Further studies based on large scale collaborations and long term monitoring across a wider area is needed to better understand the extent of effects of marine pollution and fisheries on marine ecosystem health.