

## Protecting the Dalmatian Pelicans

The **Pelican Way of LIFE** project implements a series of actions that aim to improve the Dalmatian Pelican's conservation status. These include:

- **Marking and tagging** of Dalmatian Pelicans as it allows us to expand our knowledge on where these birds eat, rest and move to but also to discover new threats and better assess causes of mortality.
- **Assessing collision risk, identifying collision hot spots** close to pelicans' nesting areas and making power lines safe for pelicans to reduce mortality.
- Surveillance and **patrolling of breeding areas** to improve nesting conditions and **reduce disturbance** particularly throughout the breeding season.
- **Environmental Education and awareness raising activities** among local stakeholders to increase their involvement in the protection of the species.
- Capacity building and **promotion of ecotourism** among local stakeholders in order to gain support and appreciation for the species.



## A conservation success story

Thanks to intensive conservation efforts, the species' population in Europe, particularly in its largest colony in Lesser Prespa Lake, underwent an important increase and therefore, the species was downlisted from *Vulnerable* to *Near Threatened* in 2017.

However, we must not let our guard down. Threats are still ongoing and Dalmatian Pelican's survival is still heavily dependent on the continuation and implementation of conservation actions. The bird flu outbreak in 2022 proved just how vulnerable this species is.

## Relationship with people

Million years old fossils confirm the timeless presence of pelicans on our planet.



In Greece, pelicans were known from antiquity, with numerous mentions in the works of Aristoteles, Aristophanes and others. They also appear in many myths during the ancient and Christian times.

Nowadays, their impressive flying skills and unique looks continue to inspire people.

Dalmatian Pelicans in particular, have always formed special bonds with the fishermen in areas they visit or breed. Although in the past fishermen saw them as competitors, in recent years their relationship is much smoother, as Dalmatian Pelicans not only attract visitors but can even turn entire areas, e.g. Lake Kerkini, into global birding destinations!

Awareness raising programmes and targeted conservation actions have also contributed to the Dalmatian Pelicans' great popularity and survival.

**Our goal is to promote the Dalmatian Pelican as an example of human-wildlife coexistence in the Balkan wetlands.**

Help us to protect this emblematic species of Greek nature!

- During their breeding period, we stay at a safe distance from the colonies where they feed or rest. We never approach the birds' nests.
- If you come across an injured Dalmatian Pelican (or any other wild bird), you immediately contact the nearest Wildlife Rehabilitation Center.
- If you observe a tagged Dalmatian Pelican, please notify the Hellenic Ornithological Society / BirdLife Greece sending the location of the bird and the information on the tag (if possible), together with relevant photographs:
  - > Via e-mail: [info@ornithologiki.gr](mailto:info@ornithologiki.gr)
  - > Via a message on Facebook or Instagram

Learn more



## The Pelican Way of LIFE

Safeguarding the Dalmatian Pelican



## Pelicans: archaic and magnificent

Pelicans are among the most characteristic and popular birds breeding in Europe. They are also one of the oldest bird species on Earth, mainly associated with wetlands, their natural habitats.

Two pelican species breed in Greece: the Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) and the Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*).



**Great White Pelicans\*** are large birds with a wingspan of over 2.5 meters. Every spring they migrate from Africa to breed in Greece and in autumn they return to their wintering grounds.

**Dalmatian Pelicans**, on the other hand, remain mainly in Greece throughout the year, covering only small distances, mostly from one wetland to the other.

The Dalmatian Pelican is classified as **Near Threatened** and is one of the largest bird species with a wingspan that can reach over 3 meters!

During the 1960s and 1970s a considerable number of Dalmatian Pelican colonies disappeared due to human-induced pressures and other threats, many of which are still present to this day.

**This is a species of international concern and Greece has a huge responsibility for its protection, since the country hosts around 20% of its global population!**



## Iconic but threatened

Like many waterbird species, the Dalmatian Pelican faces many threats due to human-induced activities and the vulnerability of its habitat.

The most important threats to the species are:



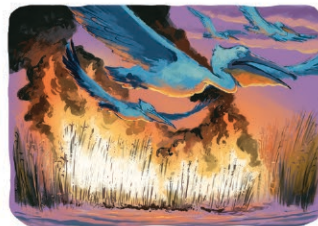
**Collisions with power lines:** a common threat for many bird species, especially for large soaring birds such as the Dalmatian Pelican, particularly when power lines are located around or even across their nesting colonies in wetlands.



**Disturbance during the breeding season:** Dalmatian Pelican colonies, usually located on small flat bare islets, are very conspicuous and usually are of easy access by boat to tourists and fishermen. These birds are very vulnerable to disturbance during the critical breeding period, and the presence of boats close by might make them abandon their nests.



**Habitat decline:** the wetlands and lagoons where Dalmatian Pelicans nest are very vulnerable to alteration and destruction due to constant human pressure on fish production, water levels, water quality, coastal development, etc.



**Climate change:** droughts, extreme weather conditions and higher temperatures may have a direct impact on the breeding productivity of the species in the years to come.

**Direct persecution:** in the past, the species was persecuted by fishermen who saw them as direct competitors for the fish resources.

In March 2022, the Highly Pathogenic **Avian Flu** strand that had been decimating bird populations all over the world reached Prespa National Park, hitting particularly strongly the Lesser Prespa Lake which holds the largest Dalmatian Pelican colony in the world (~1,400 pairs). In little over a month, the disease had killed over 1,700 pelicans. This came as a huge blow to all the conservation efforts carried out since the 80s and highlighted the vulnerability of this iconic species and the fragility of conservation actions.



## The Dalmatian Pelican wetlands

Fish-eating Dalmatian Pelicans form colonies in or near wetlands where there is ample food for themselves and their young.

In Greece, they breed in several wetlands across the country with different characteristics: from the high-altitude natural lakes of the north to the coastal lagoons in Western Greece but also in semi-natural wetlands, such as in Kerkini or Karla lakes, where artificial nesting platforms and islets have boosted both the species' population and the local communities (particularly in the case of Kerkini) which benefit from the presence of the species through ecotourism.

